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**Beautiful Mistakes:  
An Ethnographic Study of Women's Lives after Marriage  
in a Rural Sinhala Village**

By

Tharindi Dayara Udalagama

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY- DURHAM UNIVERSITY

2018

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the lives of women after marriage. It focuses on their position in households and their roles as wives and mothers. The findings are supported by a 14-month ethnography in a rural village in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. The village itself has been subject to periodical changes that have impacted village life. Contrary to popular discourses, this has not resulted in a disintegration of village life. From my exploration of women's lives this thesis shows the mechanisms that enable integration to be achieved amidst developmental changes. Moreover, women play a central role in keeping family life together. Within the parameters of women's responsibilities as caregivers, they are able to build and maintain the household and preserve a public image of a 'good house'. However, at times houses are engulfed with problems that rupture marriages and family lives. In such instances, I show how women work to restore their marriages and family lives by strategically enlisting the help of their children, affines, kin, close friends and the state. When these prove inadequate, I show how women turn to supernatural solutions such as sorcery. Women also use virtual resources in the form of televisions and mobile phones to find relief from the suffering that occurs in the home. In efforts to restore family life, women are working within structures of subjugation rather than challenging them. Women's capacity to mend ruptures in marriage and family life causes them to see their lives as a series of 'beautiful mistakes'. Family life is necessary, valued and important for the women in this thesis but it is also a source of pain and suffering.

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## Sinhala Kin Terms Used in the Thesis

### Note

The kin terms below were regularly used in the village. They were used not only by those related in conventional relations of descent and affinity but also more flexible to capture a variety of other relationships.

ammā- mother/mother in law

appachchi- father/ father in law

athtā - grandfather

ævæssa massina - marriageable male cross cousin

ævæssa nænā - marriageable female cross cousin

bænā - son in law

duva- daughter

lēli- daughter in law

loku aiyā/aiyā- elder brother

loku akkā/akkā- elder sister

māmā- uncle

nændā - aunt

nangi- younger sister

putā - son

tātthā- father/ father in law



## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my composition and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or another institute of tertiary education. No section, whole or in part, from other's work has been included unless explicitly acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'UDALAGAMA', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

T.D.Udalagama

Date: 11.09.2018

## **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent, and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Acknowledgement

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## Cast of Characters

This thesis provides a detailed account of the lives and relationships of people living in a rural village in Sri Lanka. To introduce these people, I begin with a description of the main characters that appear in this thesis. The names of the characters are pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. The ages of the characters are how they stood in 2016. The characters are presented in alphabetical order.

**Anjali** was a 29-year-old woman. She was married to Nissanka. The couple had eloped and entered marriage. Anjali was from a nearby village. Nissanka was a descendant of a wealthy family in the village. They had a 4-year-old daughter. Her house was nearby to Mihiri's house and next door to Anushā's house. She was not employed at the time of my fieldwork.

**Anushā** was a 36-year-old woman. She was married and had three sons. She descended from one of the first five families (*mul paval*) of the village and knew the village and the villagers well. She accompanied me to complete my survey and became a close friend. She taught me how the shape of the village had changed from how she remembered it as a child. She informed me of village gossip and gave me background information on the households we visited in the village for the survey. She had inherited paddy land from her parents that her husband worked on to make a living. In addition, they had an income from a house given on rent in her husband's village.

**Kanishka** is a 40-year-old man. I never met him but saw pictures of him when Lakshmi showed him to me on Facebook. I was told that he is a sales manager for a company. He visited the area once a month.

**Kumāra** was a 42-year-old man. He was married to Manjulā. I spoke with him when I visited their house to interview Manjulā. Kumāra's family was in the practice of treatments for snake bites. They were once wealthy. At the time of my fieldwork, he had cattle and made a livelihood from dairy farming.

**Lakshmi** was a 35-year-old woman. She had eloped with Upul and entered marriage at the age of 17. She and Upul had moved to the village after marriage. They had a daughter

called Sumudu and a son called Kavidu. She was not formally employed but helped out at their electronics shop in town. They were among the few villagers who had considerable wealth. I met her at the beginning of my fieldwork and lived in her house with her children for about two months towards the end of my fieldwork.

**Latā** is a 60-year-old woman. She was married to Navaratne. Their children, a son and two daughters were married and lived elsewhere. They were original beneficiaries of the Mahavæli Development Programme. They had given their paddy land on tenancy as they were unable to farm it on their own. They made a living from the tenancy as well as from growing bananas on their homestead. I got to know her when I visited her house for my household survey.

**Mādhavi** was a 24-year-old woman. She was married to Suranga - Premalatā's son. The couple eloped when she was 14 and entered marriage. Both of them were from the village. They had a four-year-old daughter. I was introduced to Mādhavi by Lakshmi. Her house was in the same homestead as Premalatā's and hence nearby to Lakshmi's house. Mādhavi was close friends with Lakshmi. She had no father, and her mother was working in the Middle East and was rarely home. She was not employed. They lived off the meagre income Suranga made from labour work.

**Manjulā** was a 36-year-old woman. She was married to Kumāra. Both of them were from the village. Their families arranged their marriage. The couple lived in Kumāra's ancestral home with their three sons and daughter. She did several odd jobs to make an income. I was introduced to her by Nandāvati.

**Mihiri** was a 23-year-old woman. She had eloped with her husband Thushan and entered marriage. They didn't have children at the time of my fieldwork. They had taken up residence in Thushan's family home after marriage. Thushan's family had lived in the village for generations. Anushā introduced me to Mihiri. She was enthusiastic to show me the way of life in the area and took me to see the reservoirs, canals and tanks. I accompanied her to her father in law's *chena* and paddy field for various tasks. She was not employed but lived from her husband's income as a soldier in the Sri Lankan army.

**Nadi** was a 35-year-old woman. She was married to Ishan. The couple had eloped when she was 16 and entered marriage. Her family had lived in the village for generations. They had three children. Her house was next door to Nandāvati and Piyasiri's house. I saw her and her children in the garden every day from my two rented rooms. I visited her house occasionally and had conversations with her. She was not employed. Her husband had a mill that brought them their primary income.

**Nandāvati** was a 58-year-old woman. She was married to Piyasiri. Her family had lived in the village for generations. Their children, a son and a daughter were also married and lived elsewhere. I rented two rooms in her house when I moved to the village. I interacted with her when sharing the household space. She enjoyed tending to her plants in the garden. She made an income by selling betel plants and renting the rooms.

**Piyasiri** was a 63-year-old man. He was married to Nandāvati. He had moved to the village after marriage. He was more open and chatty than his wife and conversed with me in the evenings after he returned from work. He had worked as a sea diver in his youth. Now, he bred ornamental fish for sale. He took fish and fish tank accessories to markets in nearby towns to make a living.

**Premalatā** was a 55-year-old woman. She had married Jāgoda not knowing that he was already married. However, the couple has three children, a daughter and two sons. They are married and lived in separate households in the village. Her house was nearby to Lakshmi's and next door to Vimalā's. I got to know her through Lakshmi. I visited her house and joined in the afternoon chats in her garden. She was very jovial. Her husband had made wealth through contract work in the past, but when I met them, they had lost most of their wealth and were out of business.

**Punchibanda** was a 75-year-old man. He was a descendant of the first five families in the village. He lived with his wife in their house which was located in the oldest area in the village. The couple had four daughters and one son who lived elsewhere. He had come to own land through mortgages and buying land that was for sale. He made a living from a coconut plantation. I met him at his home occasionally to converse about how he remembered the village then and how he thought it had changed now.

**Rasika** was a 35-year-old woman. I never met her. I was told of her by Lakshmi. She was having an extramarital relationship with Upul at the time of my fieldwork.

**Shānti** was a 43-year-old woman. She had eloped and entered marriage with Anura. She was widowed when Anura died from a heart attack about four years ago. The village was Anura's birth village that Shanti had moved to after marriage. They had a daughter and a son. Their house was built in part of Anura's parents' homestead. Anushā introduced me to Shānti when we visited her house for my household survey. We became friends, and I visited her home often. She was not employed but made an income by renting a room in her house and shop space in their homestead. She also received Anura's pension and had paddy land inherited from her parents.

**Upul** was a 39-year-old man. He was married to Lakshmi. I never met him. Lakshmi showed me pictures of him from their family albums. He had inherited his father's electronics business in town and made a living from it.

**Vimalā** was a 59-year-old woman. She was married to Kalubanda. Their three children, one son and two daughters, were married. The son and his family lived with them in their house. Her family had lived in the village for generations. The couple made a living from working in their paddy land. Her house was in front of Lakshmi's house. Vimalā was a constant visitor to Lakshmi's house. I accompanied Lakshmi when she visited Vimalā to chat or to help. Vimalā also joined Lakshmi, Premalatā and Mādhavi for afternoon chats. She was an active donor at the village temple.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*The drought in the village of Nelumyāya in the dry zone of Sri Lanka decimated Asanka's rice crop for the second year running. Abandoning the land he had inherited from his father, a settler-farmer in the village who had brought his family to the area thirty years previously, Asanka found work as a security guard in the capital Colombo, 200 kilometres to the south. Asanka's visits home to his wife Sujatā and their two children decreased over time, leading to speculation in the village that Asanka had an extramarital relationship. Following an intense argument that ended with Asanka returning to Colombo and threatening he would never return, Sujatā thought about how her life had changed since marriage – the financial problems, the marriage problems, the village gossip. She called Asanka from her mobile phone, who by now was on board a bus speeding to Colombo from Anuradhapura, and shouted at him and blamed him for ruining her life. He hung up on her. Wishing to end her sorrows (duka), Sujatā drank a toxic mix of weedicide, kerosene and oleander seeds to end her suffering. Her children raised the alarm, saving Sujatā's life. Soon afterwards, Asanka gave up his job in Colombo and returned home to Nelumyāya. The couple plan to start farming again.*

(Source: field notes, Anuradhapura, August 2014)

The encounter with Sujatā before starting my PhD research work inspired me to further investigate women's lives in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. The intention was to understand everyday problems that women encountered in their domestic spaces and how they responded to them. In Sujatā's case self-harming was a response that did solve her problems by bringing Asanka back to the household. Whether the solution was permanent or not, only time will tell. The attempt to understand responses to women's everyday problems led to the broader research question: how are the life worlds of women like Sujatā shaped after marriage?

In Sri Lankan society, the idea of marriage for women is presented as an essential aspect of their lives. Consequently, they are socialised as 'good girls' to become 'good wives' and 'good mothers' (Lynch, 1999b; de Alwis, 2002; Hewamanne, 2003). Marriage, therefore, becomes a significant threshold in a woman's life. It is one that transforms her status as a 'girl' to one of a 'wife' and one who will eventually become a 'mother'. Marriage,

however, takes many forms (Parry, 2001; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Mody, 2008; Osella, 2012). The variety of ways in which people become married suggests a spectrum which ranges from ideal types to more transgressive practices such as elopement (Parry, 2001; Mody, 2008). In Sri Lanka, as in the Indian context, women who transgress are met with violent consequences that further subjugate them within patriarchal social values and systems. However, what became apparent in this research was women's capacity to respond to problems after marriage from *within* their subjugated positions. In Sujatā's case, self-harming was her response, however, as will be illustrated in this thesis, there are many other strategies. I show how women utilise their relationships, both within and outside the house, to creatively respond to their everyday problems after marriage. I also show how women appeal to the state, the supernatural and technology in their efforts to achieve stable domestic lives.

In the violence endured by women during the partitioning of India, Das describes how women responded in 'silence' by assimilating their experiences of violence into their everyday lives (Das, 2007, p. 55). The silence that Das identifies is one in which suffering was '*shown* (sometimes with words) rather than *narrated*' (Das, 2007, p. 10). The suffering was 'not spoken in the mode of public performances' (Das, 2007, p. 10) but in a metaphor 'of a woman drinking the poison and keeping it within her' (Das, 2007, p. 54). In this sense, Das explains how women became containers of 'poisonous knowledge' thereby 'folding' suffering into everyday life (Das, 2007, p. 55). Das suggests some important directions when it comes to understanding women's suffering. In my work, she has helped illuminate the complexity of women's experiences of violence. However, the experience of women in the village was not one that 'descended' from the extraordinary to the ordinary but one that was constituted within the ordinary itself (Das, 2007). Rather than responding with silence, the women with whom I worked expressed their suffering through a variety of narrative and performative strategies.

Speaking of people's experiences of life in a war zone in Sri Lanka, Walker describes how they are able to endure conflict in everyday life (Walker, 2016). She explains how 'the present is explored in the present' to endure conflict (Walker, 2016, p. 95). In giving meaning to experience, she suggests that the shape of the everyday is constantly remade through mundane encounters as people attempt to move forward (Walker, 2016). A link can be drawn between Walker's everyday life in a war zone and the everyday domestic

challenges faced by the women I describe in this thesis. The similarity is in the 'daily strategies' and 'hidden tactics' that are used on a daily basis (Walker, 2016). In this manner, the everyday is given meaning through individual actions rather than being simply constrained by state structures that come into play in times of war (Walker, 2016). As a result, people are not mere victims but are able to find ways of resisting and rebelling in order to sustain something like a normal life (Walker, 2016). The women I speak of in this thesis do not experience the violence of a war zone as Walker's informants did. However, in their day to day life worlds, they do experience the home as a place of conflict and insecurity and one in which creative strategies had to be carefully put in place to ensure something like a normal life.

### **Women's Life Worlds**

Nation building in post-colonial Sri Lanka has given prominence to the image of the ideal Sinhala Buddhist women. De Mel explains that women stand for the nation itself: 'in need of male protection, the reproducer and nurturer of future generations and transmitter of cultural values' (de Mel, 2001, p. 3). As de Alwis also claims, women's bodies, beliefs, and behaviours were made to signify the 'culture' and 'tradition' of the nation (de Alwis, 2002). After colonisation, 'motherhood' also became a powerful symbol with women expected to reproduce for the nation (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996). Women's sexuality was also controlled in the name of 'cultural purity' with couples expected to reproduce within their ethnic communities (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996). The ideal Sinhala-Buddhist woman was depicted as a " '*panca kahani*' (complete with fair skin, long black hair, attractive body, youthful appearance and beautiful teeth) respectable in their behaviour and educated to perform the roles of 'wife' and 'mother' " (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996, p. xi). A particular notion of 'respectability' was expected of women in the form of dress and conduct that controlled a woman's sexuality (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996; de Alwis, 1997, 2002). The need to be respectable further subjugated women by pushing them into what Jayawardena and de Alwis refer to as 'sacred' domestic spaces in which women are expected to carry out the roles of wife and mother (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996, p. xi). The subjugation of women, however, varies according to class. For instance, women from middle and upper classes were expected to conform to norms of respectability while working class and peasant women were less subject to such constraints. Indeed, they were often exploited as cheap labour in agriculture, factories and plantations (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996, p. xi; de Alwis, 1997; Kurian and

Jayawardena, 2014). In my work, such distinctions are not so clear, as in the village, class itself is a very fluid and emergent notion. Part of my contribution in this thesis is to describe how ideas of respectability operate in this context.

One of the main contributors to these new class structures is government policies directed at working class and peasant women in order to get them to contribute to the nation's economy over and above their traditional place in the agrarian economy. Free education and employment opportunities were two primary methods used to achieve this goal. The opening of garment factories and job opportunities as housemaids in the Middle East opened avenues, especially for a rural woman, to enter the public domain. Development programmes such as the Mahavæli Development Programme (MDP) were initiated to better the lives of those living in and resettled in the dry zone. De Zoysa, rather optimistically, sees the MDP as a cause of the feminisation of agriculture and gender equality in village households (de Zoysa, 1995a). These efforts are cited as examples of women's potential emancipation because they allow women to have greater agency over their lives (de Zoysa, 1995a; Lynch, 1999b; Gamburd, 2000; Hewamanne, 2003). On the other hand, these instances are linked with forms of 'modernity' that threaten the traditional expectations that are placed upon women (de Mel, 2001; de Alwis, 2002). The recent regulations on female migration to the Middle East, for example, illustrates how the tension between modernity and tradition has led the state to push women back into their roles as wives and mothers firmly restricted to the household (Abeyasekera and Jayasundere, 2017).

While women involved in labour migration and industrial work have been the subject of much scholarly attention in recent decades, less has been said about the lives of women remaining resident in rural communities. The classical village studies produced from different parts of Sri Lanka account for a male narrative of village life focusing on the more male-dominated spaces of agriculture and land tenure (Tambiah, 1958, 1965; Leach, 1961; Obeyesekere, 1967). Even in documenting the formation of marriages, the links made to the inheritance of property, and to alliances made to better social position by the accumulation of wealth are strongly biased towards male perspectives (Tambiah, 1958, 1965, 2011; Leach, 1961; Yalman, 1967). Women's views of village life are sporadically explored in recent accounts of how modernity has empowered women in the rural sector (de Zoysa, 1995a; Lynch, 1999b; Gamburd, 2000; Hewamanne, 2003). In such

discussions, the focus has been on the changes to women's lives as they have become more involved with traditionally male-dominated, public spheres. The private sphere of the household, however, appears in these discourses simply as a space that is impacted by women's empowerment. For instance, Gamburd claims that women taking over the role of the breadwinner by seeking employment in the Middle East has created familial disputes in the house (Gamburd, 2000). Similarly, Lynch discusses how familial control over women has loosened as they have taken employment in rural garment factories (Lynch, 1999b). In all these views, women are portrayed as having reached a level of emancipation by challenging their subjugated positions in society. However, a gap in this discourse is the position of women who have not taken up labour opportunities outside the village but have remained. These are the women who have taken up traditional roles of wife and mother in households. They are in terms of this thesis, the ones who have made the beautiful mistakes.

Women who remained in the village to take up the roles of wives and mothers lived their lives within the restrictions placed on them as caregivers. In their everyday lives, women are compelled to be responsible for the well-being of the inhabitants of the household. Public affirmation of a woman's responsibilities to family and household are clearly seen in instances of family breakdown which are readily identified as a woman's failure. The same charge is levelled against female migrant workers leaving the family and household behind (Gamburd, 2000; Abeyasekera and Jayasundere, 2017). The woman's practices of care sometimes also include that of providing for the household. The 'double burden' of being both provider and caregiver is understood as an extension of the woman's practice of care (Hochschild and Machung, 1990). By fulfilling these responsibilities, the woman contributes to maintaining the public face of herself and her family in society. The extension of responsibilities under neo-liberal economic changes has been characterised by Trnka and Trundle as 'responsibilisation' (Trnka and Trundle, 2015). The concept of 'responsibilisation' is nested in dependencies, reciprocities and obligations in everyday life alongside relations of care (Trnka and Trundle, 2015). However, responsibilisation of women's roles leads to suffering in their everyday lives because of the expectations that go with increased responsibilities. These often go unnoticed but when they are not fulfilled it is seen as a woman's failure. It is at this point that the subjugation of women in households become apparent, for example, in domestic violence, marital rape, verbal insults and other humiliations. These experiences take place within ordinary life worlds

and often take the form of ‘wounds’ that are private and unseen (Das, 2007; Mookherjee, 2015). As these wounds are generally not public, there are fewer interventions in place at a state level to help resolve household conflicts or to address women’s suffering. The remedies that women use are therefore drawn from everyday life itself. This is not to say that the state mechanisms are not utilised by women. I will elaborate later in this thesis how women employ state mechanisms, such as the police, as spaces in which to publicly perform creative responses to their suffering, for example, in demonstrations of anger and helplessness. Whether these performances achieve the necessary effects is not a question I answer in this thesis. What I do wish to draw attention to is women’s capacity to bring attention to their condition and to use strategies from everyday life to manage this.

## **Capacity in Everyday Life**

The idea of capacity is one that has entered social science discourse in a variety of ways. In this section, I review some of these usages and link them to the capacities of relationships in everyday life. Notions of capacity are typically tied into discourses of development and carry ideas of how things might ‘improve’, ‘strengthen’ or ‘develop’ to achieve measurable outcomes (Douglas-Jones and Shaffner, 2017). In this view, capacity is linked to the idea of ‘potential’ (Douglas-Jones and Shaffner, 2017). Douglas-Jones and Shaffner explain that the ‘ubiquity’ of capacity makes its existence self-evident and persuasive in ways that in turn bring hope (Douglas-Jones and Shaffner, 2017). In this sense, capacity is futuristic, bringing hope to create better futures for those in need of development, such as the impoverished communities of Ethiopia, post-earthquake Haitian aid practitioners, modernization projects for the Amahuaca people in Amazonia, or health workers in Ghana (Coppock *et al.*, 2011; Boulding, 2017; Hewlett, 2017; LaHatte, 2017).

LaHatte, for example, describes Haitian people’s understanding of capacity building in terms of a metaphor: ‘my people are sheets’ (LaHatte, 2017, pp. 17–18). The phrase captures the way that built capacity in relationships serves as a security blanket during times of disaster (LaHatte, 2017, pp. 17–18). In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, previously built mutual obligations and reciprocity were activated to discover whether one’s kin was alive (LaHatte, 2017). These capacities were also drawn upon to

share the sorrows of losing kin, and providing care and support for kin who had lost everything (LaHatte, 2017). As a result, relationships were considered to be a lasting capacity that could bring hope in uncertain futures (LaHatte, 2017). In what follows, the women I encountered and whose voices I bring forth illustrated similar capacities in their day to day interactions. As in the Haitian case, relationships operate as a kind of capacity which women draw upon to overcome challenges and create hope for the future. Bringing together ideas of capacity with everyday practices of sharing, reciprocity and mutual obligation makes an essential link with the anthropology of kinship (Carsten, 1997, 2000, 2004; Sahlins, 2013). Passing life experiences between one another in the form of solutions, advice and comfort, however, is not only an important capacity among the women in the village I studied, but it is also the basis for a sense of relatedness.

The term ‘relatedness’ is used in opposition to or alongside the term ‘kinship’ to allow an openness to indigenous idioms of being related rather than a reliance on pre-given definitions (Carsten, 2000, p. 4). Carsten claims that the term “‘relatedness’ makes possible comparisons between Inupiat and English or Nuer ways of being related without relying on an arbitrary distinction between biology and culture, and without presupposing what constitutes kinship’ (Carsten, 2000, p. 5). Within the term, ‘relatedness’ kinship is given meaning as a process that is continuously ‘under construction’ with everyday acts (Carsten, 2000). More importantly, the previously overlooked kinship perspectives of women and children are included within this analytical frame (Carsten, 2000). This view is exemplified in Carsten’s research with a Malay community in Langkawi, Malaysia, where she illustrates how kinship is created in small acts of hospitality and feeding with longer-term acts of sharing food and space (Carsten, 1997). In these acts, she argues that shared substances are transformed into blood making everyone ‘related’ (Carsten, 1997). In this view, Carsten accounts for the fluidity in kinship that has the potential to assimilate people into groups as kin. Carsten’s ideas are helpful in understanding the situation in Sri Lankan villages in at least two ways.

First, the term the women used to explain their connections to one another is *badima*. The term was explained to me as being ‘beyond friendship’ and could be used to describe a connection between places, things and animals (cf. Lamb, 2000). In focusing on the *badima* between people, it was described as a processual development that was closely linked with feelings of intimacy and attachment (*hagim*). These feelings represent both

positive emotions such as pleasure, joy, love and affection or negative emotions such as anger, disgust, sadness, distrust, jealousy and shame. Therefore, the nature of *bādima* can be either positive or negative. In practice *bādima* is developed through sharing, borrowing, helping each other in daily life in ways that ultimately make everyone related to everyone else in the village. The *bādim* (plural of *bādima*) in one's life was explained to me as similar to the roots of a tree. Just like the roots hold the tree to the soil, the *bādim* hold people to life itself. As tree roots also come in different shapes, lengths and sizes, *bādim* too are in different shapes, lengths and sizes. Some *bādim* are like tap roots (*mudun mula*) and are primary; others are secondary like lateral roots. The interplay of *bādim* in social life allows people to be both dependent and vulnerable at different times and with different people.

Second, the use of kin terminology in Sri Lanka is said to be fluid and flexible and sometimes does not reflect either descent or affinity (Stirrat, 1977). Indeed, those who have developed a *bādima* would often refer to each other using formal kin terms. In explaining their *bādima*, the kin term may well be given the suffix '*vage*' which translates as 'like'. For instance, when a woman claims that another woman is 'like a mother' to her, it means that the practice of their *bādima* is similar to that of a mother-daughter relationship (*ammā vage*). In this sense, the kin terminology used does not reflect a classically defined mother-daughter relationship. It is in the explanation of *bādima* that the form of the relationship is made clear.

Although *bādima* is usually associated with positive connections, it can also be negative indicating 'ruptures' in former relationships (*bādimak nā*), a situation that was relatively common in the village. Attempts to understand *bādima* made clear the tensions and harmonies that were present and how people constantly made and unmade their relationships. Trawick's description of love in a Tamil family in Southern India also details this volatile aspect of family relationships (Trawick, 1992). Carsten refers to relationships as being 'double edged' (Carsten, 2013, p. 247). Commenting on Sahlins' concept of 'mutuality of being' as a 'specific quality of kinship', Carsten highlights that a 'thickening or thinning of relatedness' is also a 'specific quality of kinship' (Carsten, 2013, p. 247; Sahlins, 2013, p. ix). It is evident in kinship studies that everyday practices of procreation, feeding, living together, and memory make relationships 'thick', but they can also make them 'thin' (Carsten, 2013). An example of this quality in kinship can be drawn from Simpson's work on divorce (Simpson, 1998).



Researching divorce in Western families, Simpson claims that divorce is an expression of kinship rather than a breakdown of family life (Simpson, 1998). Though the marriage comes to an end in the legal sense, the relationalities continue in newly reconfigured ways, typically focused on the needs and wants of children (Simpson, 1998). The ‘relatedness’ developed after a divorce is located outside of conventional expressions of marriage, family and home creating new possibilities of engagements between fathers, mothers, and their children (Simpson, 1998). Therefore, rather than endings, the understanding of divorce itself brings about a continuation of relationality through time. Similarly, the practice of *bædim* can go through ‘thickening’ or ‘thinning’ over time. For example, village rumour is one of the main reasons that relationships between women become strained and ‘thin’. However, what I will go on to demonstrate is that women maintain relatedness even amidst ruptures in their relationships. As LaHatte’s interlocutors explained, relationships have a lasting capacity that persists despite conflicts (LaHatte, 2017). In the following section, I will explain how I came to create my own *bædima* within the village and how I came to know the women whose worlds I describe in this thesis.

### **Becoming Kin-like**

Towards the end of July 2015, I was making my way to the Mahavæli Regional Office in Tambuttegama with a letter from their head office in Colombo asking local officers to assist me in my research. It was by chance that I found the village that I call Divulvæva to carry out my ethnography. It resulted from a meeting with an Agronomist-Mr. Saman Ekanayake at the Agriculture Department in the Regional Office. Mr. Ekanayake was outgoing and had many friends. He told me that he made friends by helping people and then they helped him back. I was quick to realise that this meant that if he helped me, I too would have to help him at a later date. He allowed me to sit at his desk while I figured out potential villages to live in for my research. We gradually became more familiar as we shared the desk and the lunch we brought to work. The way we addressed each other also changed as I called him by his first name Saman joined with the kin term *aiyā*. He called me by my first name joined with the kin term *nangi*.

After I had made a list of villages, based on size and location that seemed plausible for my research, Saman *aiyā* arranged for me to visit the villages while he did field visits in the same villages. He had become very keen to find me a village to conduct my study. He

spoke to farmers he knew from the villages I had chosen, to ask if there was a safe and secure place for an unmarried girl to stay for about a year. When we visited those farmers sometimes in their paddy fields and sometimes in their houses, they scratched their heads and looked at Saman *aiyā* and me with despair. I felt that although they wanted to help, there was a problem that prevented them. One farmer said, ‘we would have given a room in our house but you know sir, our *appachchi* gets drunk in the evening. It is not a suitable place for a girl’. Another said ‘we can give our open room outside of the house but she is an unmarried girl so how can we be responsible when we leave the house for farming? We will be back only in the evening’. It was dawning on me that being unmarried and a woman was going to impact on my access to a village as well as my research.

Another query from the farmers was about the relationship I had with Saman *aiyā*. One woman asked, ‘is this whom you are to marry sir?’. Saman *aiyā* who was married and had two children blushed and quickly said, ‘no no I am already married. She is like a sister (*nangi kenek vage*). So I have to find a good safe place for her to stay in’. This was my first experience of being assigned a ‘like’ kin role to another to prove how I relate to them. The ‘like’ kin roles implied the nature of our *aiyā-nangi* relationship. This gave us an understanding as to how we should behave towards one another and legitimated our relationship to others. For instance, it gave legitimacy to sharing a desk, sharing food and Saman *aiyā*’s dedication to help me to find a suitable village for my research. The differentiation was necessary because as mentioned earlier, kin terms are used fluidly (Stirrat, 1977). The kin terms *aiyā-nangi* are also used by couples to imply the expected roles of protector and nurturer (Sirisena, 2018). By using the suffix ‘*vage*’ we were able to differ from the use of the same kin terms between couples as well as those who were siblings or cousins by descent. The suffix indicated to us as well as others the nature of our *aiyā-nangi* relationship which was not romantic, not by descent but constructed through familiarity and sharing.

I returned to Colombo and continued to think about how to find a village. One day, Saman *aiyā* phoned me and said, ‘I have good news! I told my wife about you and your research, and she said you should come to our village. We have a lot of family problems here’. Saman *aiyā*’s wife, Ganga *akka*, was a midwife and had excellent knowledge of the village. She was born and brought up in the village, and her parents and siblings also live in the village. When I returned to Anuradhapura in the following week I went with Saman

*aiyā* to meet his wife and visit his home. She greeted me with a smile and offered me a chair in their half-built home. She said, ‘we would have kept you here with us if our house was built. But, see, we only have this one room and kitchen now. We have applied for a loan, and once we get it, we will start to build. After we complete it, you can come and live here’. Saman *aiyā* said, ‘yes, till then I have asked the *nandā* and *māmā* of that house in front of ours to keep you. They were looking for a tenant to rent a room in their house. So it all worked out well’. Nandāvati and Piyasiri lived across the road from Saman *aiyā*’s house. That evening I went with Saman *aiyā* and Ganga *akkā* to meet them. And so, through my relationship with Saman *aiyā*, I began to build other relationships with people in the village.

Nandāvati and Piyasiri were an elderly couple whose children had married and left the house. They were delighted to have me live with them. Nandāvati showed me two rooms, which were sectioned out with a steel grill that could be closed, separating the space from the main house. I had to cook for myself because Nandāvati said that they could not provide food for me, as the way they eat would not be suitable for me. Later on, I realised what she meant was the irregular patterns of cooking in the house. In their household as well as in many households cooking was not considered a regular task given much thought or planning. The pattern was to cook something at meal times; sometimes by picking a vegetable grown in the garden or making use of some grain or sweet potatoes that were in season. I also realised that meat and fish were rare luxuries for the average villager. I was very content with how everything fell into place to begin my fieldwork. I promised to pay a rent of 7000 rupees (GBP 35) to them every month and an additional amount for electricity. Water pumped from the well was bill free. They said that they would clean and prepare the house for me by the end of August.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2015, I moved into my two rooms in Nandāvati’s and Piyasiri’s house and set up the house to start my fieldwork. Being Sri Lankan and Sinhalese helped me to blend in very quickly to village life. However, being from Colombo also marked me out as different from everyone. There were things I knew of and related to and also things I did not know and could not relate to. Ganga *akkā* introduced me to a few households in the village on her midwife duty rounds. I made relationships with her parents who were from the first five families to have settled in the area. I also met her extended family. One relationship led to another, and my familiarity with the village grew

quickly. Ganga *akkā* introduced me to Anushā who helped me to do my household survey. She was also from one of the first five families to settle in the area and had considerable knowledge of all the households in the village as well as its landscape. We also fell into an *akkā-nangi* relationship. I was told that the Death Donation Society (*maranādhāra samitiya*) would be a proper forum through which to introduce myself to the village as every household is a member of this Society. The Death Donation Society was initially formed by the villagers to organise funerals in the village. The significance of the Society has increased since its inception in the 1970s. During my time in the village, the Death Donation Society emerged as the leading organisation that handled matters of village life. The meetings were held on the first day of every month. I had to wait until 1<sup>st</sup> of October for their next meeting to formally introduce myself to the village. In the meantime, I went around the village with Anushā doing my household survey, and she informally introduced me to many residents of the village.

The villagers were hospitable and welcoming. The moment I explained that the research was for my education, they were happy to participate. For them, helping a student in her endeavour to learn was a meritorious act (*pinak*). Their enthusiasm to help me also indicated the status they gave to education. My relationship with Anushā also helped me to gain access to households. Her familiarity with the villagers opened doors and meant that families welcomed me. She introduced me to Mihiri and Shānti whom both became key informants for my research. Then, Ganga *akkā* introduced me to Lakshmi who was said to be having a ‘big family problem’ (*loku pavul prashnayak*). Lakshmi was to become a central figure in my fieldwork and features throughout this thesis. Lakshmi introduced me to Premalatā, Vimalā and Mādhavi who lived nearby Lakshmi’s house. All these relationships were understood in terms of ‘like’ kin roles. I was *nangi* to Lakshmi and Shānti. I was *akkā* to Mihiri and Mādhavi, and I was *duva* to Premalatā and Vimalā. Spending time with them and sharing with them helped me to ‘build a connection’ (*bādimak tiyanavā*) that was crucial to the kind of ethnography this thesis entails.

The acquisition of the *bādima* was indicated to me in different ways. For instance, after three months of going around the village, helping me to complete my household survey, I asked Anushā if I could pay her for her time. She looked at me surprised and said, ‘that is what you think of me, huh? Is that the *bādima* we have?’ I was surprised at having annoyed her with my question. On reflection, I realised that I could not put a price tag

on the help she gave me to do my research. It was immeasurable. Anushā would come with me daily, in rain or sun, to cover five houses, which was the target I had set. She was pushing me to work and making appointments on my behalf with those who were employed and therefore not at home in the mornings. Sometimes we took her 3-year-old boy along with us, and she looked after him while I did my survey. How could I even think of paying her money for such help? Our relationship had become more than friendship; being ‘sister like’ (*nangi vagē*) had developed into being ‘my sister like’ (*magēma nangi vagē*).

Lakshmi indicated our *badima* by saying that we must have been sisters in a previous life. Shānti said, ‘you came from nowhere into our lives and made *badim* with us. You are going to give us much sorrow when you leave!’. Mihiri said, ‘don’t forget me when you visit us hereafter you can stay with me in our house’. Vimalā said, ‘I am not going to be around to see you go, I don’t want to say goodbye!’. Premalatā said, ‘where ever you go my blessings are with you. Come back to see us before we die’. It is only upon my exit from the village that I clearly recognised the nature of the *badima* that I had developed with these women. With tears, hugs, little gifts and promises to write letters and keep connected, I left the village on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2016. The *badima* that I constructed with these women over time was crucial to the ethnography that follows. In the next section, I will reflect on how my positionality was shaped during fieldwork and the ethics of eliciting intimate narratives of women’s lives after marriage.

## **The Daughter of the Village**

Fieldwork is often described as having a beginning when one enters the field and an ending when one exits. For me, as a Sinhalese woman, this was not quite so clear-cut. Being a ‘native’ who spoke Sinhala fluently and who could have been a village girl, I was entering a field with which I already had a degree of familiarity. Moreover, exiting the village did not mark the end of my connections to people in the village. Throughout the writing of this thesis, my relationship with villagers continued through letters, text and mobile phone conversations. I imagine that in future these relationships will continue. However, I will inevitably be ‘different’ from the villagers. I have the privilege of being educated, employed by the University of Colombo and being born to affluent parents. Colombo city life and life in Divulvæva are far apart. Despite this distance, I was able to

develop significant relationships or *badima* with women of the village. On reflection, the success in making relationships was the way in which I fell into the role of a ‘vulnerable observer’ (Behar, 1997) who happened to be female and unmarried. In other words, I was ‘entering a world of social relations at a precise point’ (Simpson, 2006, p. 130). The ‘precise point’ was determined by the ways in which the villagers saw me, and my own personal circumstances and social interactions that took place in the field (Simpson, 2006). The villagers used various terms to refer to me when talking about me to one another. I was a student (*igena ganna lamayek*), a good friend (*bonda yaluwek*), daughter of the village (*gamema duva*), and one who is sister-like (*nangi vage*). The way they saw me was determined by my circumstances as a single woman. This also determined the patterns of interaction that were possible for me to develop. For instance, I could not interact freely with young men in the village because I was an unmarried young woman. On the other hand, I was able to be involved with women and be part of their social circles without any restrictions. More specifically, older married women responded actively to me as a single woman. It was as if they wanted to impart knowledge of married life to one who had not yet made the beautiful mistake. Indeed, such was their concern to guide me that they made suggestions about eligible partners and I received seven marriage proposals in the course of my fieldwork.

The need for villages to place me was also evident in the use of the term ‘daughter of the village’ (*gamema duva*). The term was first used by the elderly secretary of the Death Donation Society. He used it during a milk-boiling ceremony that I attended in the village. He indicated to others present at the ceremony that though I have no kinship by descent or affinity, I have become a ‘daughter’ to everyone in the village through interactions such as taking part in village ceremonies, visiting households, going to the paddy fields and *chena*, and taking part in village Societies. As a consequence of this designation, I was given milk-rice from the top of the pot. The serving of milk-rice follows a clear hierarchy based on morality and virtue rather than age and status. First, it is given to the gods, then to children, then to the elite families in the village, and finally to everyone else. Being served from the top of the pot then meant that the villagers had integrated me as someone important to them. However, this did not mean that I had power or authority over the villagers in any way. It was a gesture of respect, approval of my conduct and acceptance of my presence in the village.

However, whilst being a daughter of the village gave me considerable standing, it also brought limitations. For instance, as a daughter, I had to succumb to the authority of all those who have taken the role of parents and grandparents. Nandavati and Piyasiri attempted to take a parental role by advising me on who to not associate and where to not eat or drink from. I would be told by others to get to my two rented rooms before dark. I would be told not to speak with young men in the village. I was constantly asked if any young men were harassing me on the roads. Children from the houses I was visiting were sent to escort me to my two rented rooms after dark. These actions were justified by the many in the following terms: ‘we are responsible for your protection now’. Here protection (*araksava*) is not just about physical protection but is also about the preservation of morality and honour and the avoidance of shame.

As my fieldwork developed and relationships became more intense, my designation as the ‘daughter of the village’ came under strain. My every action in the village was commented on and was of public concern. When I moved to Lakshmi’s house in the last three months of my fieldwork, this was interpreted by some villagers as a rebuff to Nandavati and Piyasiri. Although Nandavati and Piyasiri had looked after me well their parental oversight was also constraining my research interests. Following the move, I was told, ‘ah! Now you can be as you like in Lakshmi’s house’. Most commented on the lack of protection at Lakshmi’s house: ‘I don’t know if it’s safe for you to be in Lakshmi’s house. She can’t even protect herself’. These attitudes were not new to me and were ones that I have encountered in other situations in my life. However, in order to develop my insights into rural village life, it was necessary to challenge and transgress these patterns of authority and thereby make them more visible. What should be clear by now, is that my ethnography is coloured by my emotions and experiences as a woman born and brought up in Sinhala culture. Furthermore, my status as a young unmarried woman was key to the form that my *badima* took with the villages. With these kinds of relationships come significant ethical responsibilities.

The opportunity to share intimate accounts of women’s lives was a great privilege. Although the stories contained intimate details and were of great sensitivity, the women were keen for me to hear them and moreover for me to write about them for a wider audience. For them, what was important was for me to write their stories so that the world would know of their village, their lives and their suffering and how they coped with it.

Yet, despite the women's desire to have their stories told, I have anonymised all names and places for ethical reasons. Primarily, it is essential that the subjects of these narratives cannot be traced. Nonetheless, in honouring my promise to the women, I have attempted to write as lucidly as possible to provide thick descriptions of their lives. In doing so, I am hoping that the reader will be able to enter into the vulnerabilities that I experienced as an anthropologist and thereby get a sense of the women's worlds that I describe (Behar, 1997).

## Chapter Outlines

In chapter two, I introduce the village, Divulvæva (a pseudonym), where I lived during my fieldwork. I begin with a historical account of the area. I will explain how through the times of kings, colonials and post-colonial governments, water and land were essential features of village life. Throughout history, water has figured as the problem and the solution to this parched landscape that the British named as the 'dry zone'. I will describe how the coming of the MDP to Divulvæva in the 1970s attempted to reproduce an ideal village life symbolised by a tank, temple and paddy field. I will discuss how villagers claimed that the MDP had 'disintegrated' the village and changed village life for the worst. However, I argue that though social changes had impacted on social relations, women have managed to integrate the village by building social relations along roads, houses and canals.

In chapter three, I describe the ideal types of womanhood to which women are expected to aspire. I will illustrate how deviation from such ideal types results in blame, and labels the woman as being without shame or fear (*lajja-baya na*). Village society retaliates to such transgressions by being cruel and wicked (*napuru*) to the woman and labelling them as a 'ripened girl' (*pabichca kellek*) or a 'mature woman' (*ammandi*). The women respond to this vilification with attempts to reclaim their propriety as 'good daughter in laws', 'good wives' and 'good mothers'. In this process, women amidst other strategies mainly aspire to build an independent house which will indicate to others that the marriage is successful. I will argue how transgressions are unable to challenge social hierarchies as the violent responses to transgressions situate the transgressor back in the same social hierarchy under different roles.



In chapter four, I explore the link between the building of houses and the development of family life. The building of a house is seen as a public proclamation of the wealth and intimacy of the inhabitants. The development of wealth and intimacies within the house determines whether the building is termed a 'good house' or a 'problem house' in the public sphere. The responsibility of making a 'good house' and preventing it from becoming a 'problem house' is publicly acclaimed to be the duty of the woman. The women too identify with this responsibility and attempt to maintain a 'good family life' by restructuring houses and practising tolerance. Women who manage to tolerate problems and maintain a 'good family life' are publicly referred to as 'courageous women' (*diriya kathak*). I will argue that the importance given to maintaining the public image of a house is directly linked with the public image of the woman of the house, indicating a connection between the woman and the house.

In chapter five, a marital dispute between Lakshmi and her husband Upul will be explored to illustrate how suffering and discord is understood through the metaphor of 'fire'. The fire spreads inside the house impacting the children in both the short-term and the long-term and is influenced by kin, affines, friends and the state. The woman's subjugated social position is reproduced even in the event of domestic violence. As a result, the woman performs her suffering through anger which becomes legitimised and accepted publicly. The suffering that is experienced by Lakshmi is layered. In other words, villagers, friends, relatives and I as the ethnographer were all given access to different layers. However, for Lakshmi much of her suffering is not visible, it is an 'unseen wound'. I will argue that women's subjugation in social hierarchies furthers their helplessness and in turn causes an existential crisis that is emotionally expressed but which cannot be 'thought through'.

In chapter six, I describe how Lakshmi attempted to cool down herself and her house by practising sorcery. The practice of sorcery is used in Divulvæva to solve everyday problems that are experienced by villagers. I will explain how the local demon gods, Kadavara and Kāli, are thought of like a father figure and a mother figure who listens to the plight of their children - the devotees - and intervene to bring justice to them. The practice of sorcery is considered a 'moral practice' that has the power to change immoral behaviour in others. By focusing on Lakshmi's practice of sorcery, I will illustrate how the 'moral practice' of sorcery becomes a therapeutic journey for her to heal her 'unseen wounds'. The healing allowed for a positive change in her mental attitude which meant that she

could ‘think through’ her suffering. I will argue that the practice of sorcery fills a gap in women’s lives that state institutions fail to rectify.

In the last ethnographic chapter, the women’s perspectives on love and sex will be explored. The women explain extramarital relationships as motivated by ‘greed’ (*kadare*) or an ‘excessive desire’ in men and women. Those who engage in extramarital relationships explain their actions as resulting from ‘unmet desires’. The emergence of new technologies such as ‘mega-teledramas’ and mobile phones have contributed to formulating and executing ‘imaginations of love’ in women. The women build virtual relationships with ‘mobile lovers’ to satisfy their ‘unmet desires’ which is to belong and be cared for, that their husbands have failed to satisfy. I will argue that extramarital relationships, in both their virtual and non-virtual forms, have created avenues for women to fulfil their desires within their subjugated positions and the constraints of their households.

## Chapter 2

### Divulvæva: A Village in the Dry Zone

One evening I met Punchibanda, a man in his seventies. He was a respected village elder and descended from one of the first five families to settle in the village. I asked him how he remembered the village then, compared to now. He sat in his easy-chair and told me while preparing beetle to chew (*bulath vita*) that the village had changed for the worse. He said:

What happened after Mahavæli came to the village is that a son forgot to respect his father. In the past, he would ask the father where to sow paddy and learn how to sow paddy from the father. But when Mahavæli gave land to everyone married over 18, sons got power, and the fathers lost their power. The son sowed his paddy field by himself. Rather than the father, it was the Mahavæli that taught the son to sow his field. And sons were given 0.5 acres for a homestead, then he left the father's house after marriage and built his own house.

In Punchibanda's view, with development, the authority of parents over their children has changed, creating distance between family members. I asked him if he could explain this further and he continued:

In the past, the village was united. If one person was sick, the others would get together and sow his field or harvest his field for him. When we had to change hay on our roof, everyone would get together and help us. It is not like that now. Then even the casket for a dead person was made in the village.

Furthermore, the communal solidarity of the village has changed; the relationships between co-villagers have become distant. I asked him what he thought the reason was for such changes in the village and he said,

That is a very big question, I think in the future people will not even be able to live in their own families. They are misled (*rævatilā*) and running

behind money. Now everyone is copying one another. They try to do what others do. There is competition. There is no unity even at home. There is no sharing; everyone is competing to earn money to educate children. There are no limits. There is no peace in the house. No one is respecting elders because as I said before; the sons have power, so the father has no place.

For Punchibanda the emphasis on money in society is the cause for the breakdown of kinship hierarchies and communal solidarity in the village. He continued to say,

There is good, bad, right, and wrong in this country but people do not know that now. In the past it was there, this is right, that is wrong. The grandparents taught the grandchildren. In the evenings we get together in one house, and they taught us. Now there is nothing like that. In the past people were united, there were no jealousies.

The cause for the changes in the village for him stemmed from a decay in people's morality that is linked with their economic aspirations. Punchibanda's account of the changes in the village was similar to the way many other elderly villagers felt. These elders who lived in the village before the coming of the Mahavæli Development Programme (MDP) remembered a better village.

Punchibanda's narrative of changes in village life is not novel. Development and the emergence of a capital-based economy are said to have dismantled the harmonious kin relations that existed in village life (Tambiah, 1955; Morrison, Moore and Lebbe, 1979; Brow, 1981; Perera, 1985, 1992; Spencer, 1990a; Sørensen, 1996; de Munck, 1997, 1999). The state's initiatives in the form of 'colonisation schemes' which resettled people elsewhere in return for land and water so that a livelihood can be made from agriculture, have contributed to the changes in rural village life (Roberts, 1980; Silva and Vidanapathirana, 1984; Stanbury, 1988; Pfaffenberger, 1990). The schemes have even been said to be a cause for the civil war that ensued on the island for over 30 years (Spencer, 1990c; Muggah, 2008). As Punchibanda notes, due to social change the *baðima* (connection) among the villagers, as well as among family members, have distanced creating moral decay.

The changes to land tenure have been said to be the prime cause for disintegration in villages (Tambiah, 1955). Focusing more on social changes in post-independence Sri Lanka, Morrison, Moore and Lebbe have further reasoned that the growth of population, the decline of paddy, the development of capitalism, and the politicisation of rural areas are reasons for the disintegration of the village (Morrison, Moore and Lebbe, 1979). Brow extends this argument by stating that disintegration is consequential to the replacement of the patron-client system, that is, from one linked to the social relations in paddy cultivation and the exchange of caste services to a new system where villagers looked up to the state to guide them and support them, rather than to each other or a landed elite (Brow, 1981). Therefore, Punchibanda's view of changed social relations in the village is well accounted for in village studies in Sri Lanka.

In this chapter, I will introduce Divulvæva, the village where I did my ethnography in 2015/2016. The village is part of the 'colonisation scheme' named MDP. Before explaining of the village, I will introduce the MDP and the area surrounding Divulvæva. Here, I will attempt to detail the impact of the development that took place in the area on village life. In explaining Divulvæva as I found it in the ethnographic present, I will explore the circumstances that Punchibanda found so problematic. I will show that the absence of a female perspective of village life has resulted in producing a male-biased view of a disintegrated village life consequent to social change. I will argue that though changes to village life have fractured relationships, new mechanisms centralised around women have evolved to maintain solidarity or retain a *bædima*.

## **Developing the North Central Province**

The city of Anuradhapura features as a major centre for the development of the Sinhala Buddhist Civilisation in the island. It is considered by many historians to be the place where Buddhism was first established and the Sinhalese kingdom was formed (de Silva, 1981). Anuradhapura became the capital of Rajarata during the Anuradhapura Kingdom

(377BC-1017AD).<sup>1</sup> Later Anuradhapura became the administrative capital of Nuvarakalāviya under the Kandyan Kingdom (1514-1815AD).<sup>2</sup> In 1873 under the British colonial administration, the region was identified as the North Central Province (NCP), with Anuradhapura remaining its administrative capital. Figure one below illustrates the current boundaries of the NCP within Sri Lanka.<sup>3</sup> The area is pictured to have been a flourishing city under the kings until the invasions from South India gave cause for decline. During the colonial period to present day the area has been targeted for development by administrators. Nevertheless, the NCP remains as a place of despair. It is marked with malaria, high suicide and self harm rates and more recently of chronic kidney disease (Silva, 2008; Pearson *et al.*, 2011; Wickremasinghe, Peiris-John and Wanigasuriya, 2011). In a more positive light, the NCP is viewed as where most of the country's rice is cultivated. The people of NCP take pride in being the providers of rice to the whole country. However, the lack of water in the dry landscape is persistent as a main problem for cultivation in the area. During the time of the Sinhalese kings a solution was to construct tanks to collect the seasonal monsoon rains that would cascade from

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<sup>1</sup> Rajarata meant the land of the king which was a region bordered by two rivers - Dæduru Oya that flows to the west and the longest river in Sri Lanka, the Mahaveli River that flows to the east of the island. The three ancient kingdoms, Rajarata, Māya and Ruhunu, took form as a result of kings giving administrative powers to their sons to rule different parts of the island (de Silva, 1981). At certain points of history there were more than three divisions but de Silva states that the three kingdoms have been consistent from the time of king Aggabodhi I (564-598AD) until the South Indian invasions that compelled the kingdom to be moved to elsewhere on the island (de Silva, 1981). There is reason to believe that the three kingdoms were independent principalities with their own rule and powers but submissive to the king of Rajarata (de Silva, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> A part of Rajarata surfaces again with the name Nuvarakalāviya under the Kandyan kingdom (1514-1815AD). At that time the population had decreased and most tanks and irrigation networks had decayed. Jayathilake states that only three large tanks; Kalā væva, Nuvara væva and Padaviya væva existed in a moderate condition (Jayathilake, 2011). He states that combining the names of these tanks generated the name Nuvarakalāviya. Anuradhapura was considered the capital of Nuvarakalāviya, which was divided into three divisions and ruled by three noble men of the Kandyan kings' gentry (Jayathilake, 2011). With the signing of the agreement between the British and the Kandyan king in 1815, Nuvarakalāviya along with the rest of the Kandyan kingdom came under the rule of the British.

<sup>3</sup> The total population of the province is of 820,000 representing all ages, with 418,435 males and 401,567 females as per 2009 census data. The majority is Sinhalese Buddhist, with 8.31% Sri Lankan Moors, 0.68% Sri Lankan Tamil and 0.06% Indian Tamil. The population is scattered in a land area of 7179 km<sup>2</sup> (717900 hectare) with a population density of 114 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (1.1 per hectare).

one to the other irrigating the paddy lands (Gunawardena, 1981; Panabokke, 1999)<sup>4</sup>. In consequence, village life in the area was highly dependent on the tank water.

*Figure 1 The North Central Province*



The exposure to laws and regulations under British rule sophisticated village life, which made communal cooperation and the irrigation customs that existed under the traditional system less efficient (Roberts, 1980). Further, village society was stratified into competing interests, which profited from each other's misfortunes, creating a class of non-cultivating landowners who sharecropped their land and drew rents and interest payments (Roberts, 1980). The ownership of land in private gave rise to a rural class of landowners to whom peasant farmers became dependent for land tenancy (Pfaffenberger, 1990). The new class of rural landowners exploited the peasant farmers within a patron-client system that later with the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931 formed into a political campaign (Pfaffenberger, 1990). The traditional customs and the cooperating structure of village life were undermined by changing patterns of trade, competition and litigation which contributed to new strains and stresses in village society (Roberts, 1980). Mapping changes to land ownership in the NCP into three phases, Perera claims that prior to 1930s the changes were gradual and cumulative as the attempts were to bring villages into greater contact with the national economic system (Perera, 1992, p. 96). The second phase, from

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<sup>4</sup>Appendix 1 is a photograph of an illustration of the flow of the canal Yoda æla that fed the tank cascade system in the area, taken from the 1884 colonial administrative report preserved at the Sri Lanka National Archives.

the 1930s to the 1970s focused more on welfare and development activities where government agencies attempted to bring services to the village level (Perera, 1992, p. 96). In the third phase, after the 1970s, Perera says that the pace of development accelerated as new development strategies were introduced and the state embarked on ambitious development programmes such as the MDP paving way for rapid social change that was difficult to incorporate into village life (Perera, 1992, p. 96).

The MDP was the first multipurpose project on the island. It was initiated by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government of Sirimavo Bandaranayake (in office from 1970-1977) to sustain the agrarian economy by providing water to the dry zone from the wet zone. The objective was to be met by changing the course of the waters of the island's longest river, the Mahavæli. The MDP was initiated on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1970 by building a dam at Polgolla to turn the waters of the Mahavæli to the dry zone. The project was to be completed in three phases over a period of 30 years (Muggah, 2008). Thirteen separate systems spanning nine districts in the central, northern and the eastern provinces were to be newly irrigated and resettled with peasants (Muggah 2008). However, the election victory by J. R. Jayawardene and his United National Party (UNP) in 1977 brought changes to the original plan. The UNP government (1978-1989), leaning more towards right-wing capitalist ideologies, led to the establishment of an executive presidency and an open economy. Their policy was to commercialise agriculture so that it would become a profitable segment of the open economy. For this reason, they accelerated the MDP to be completed within five years. As a result, a major resettlement of people compared to previous settlement schemes took place in the dry zone. Inhabitants of villages that were flooded by the building of reservoirs and electric power plants were settled in new villages in the dry zone. It is approximated that the MDP resettled 140,000 families from their original villages in the dry zone (Tennekoon, 1988). Furthermore, people from all over the island were given the opportunity to apply for settlement in the dry zone in return for water and land to cultivate.

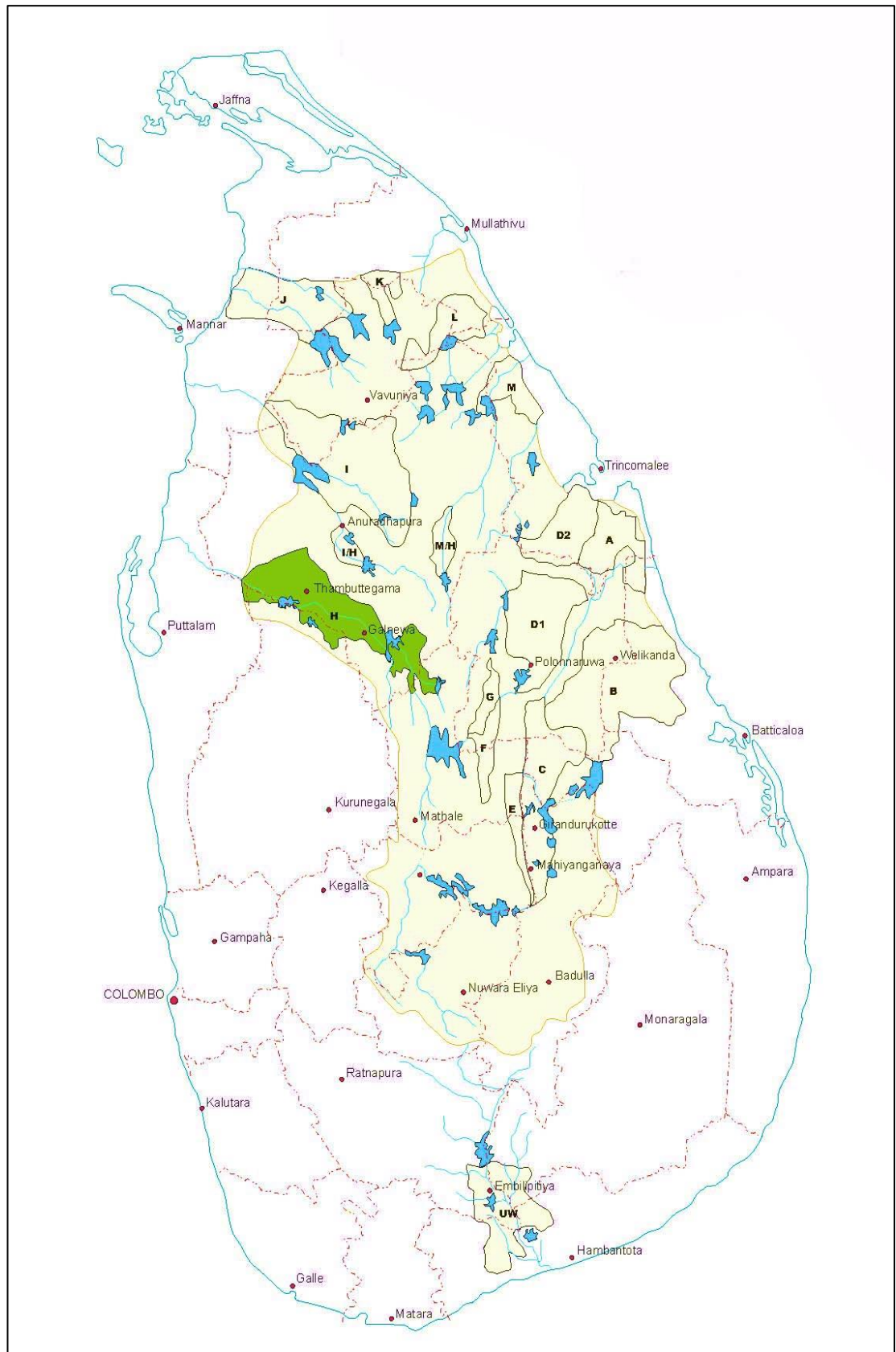
The UNP's vision was to create a 'righteous society' (*dharmishta samājayak*) in these newly resettled areas, as well as across the whole island. Kemper describes how this vision influenced Jayawardena's policies and included a return to past practices following the traditions of the kings, specifically the moral conduct of the Indian king Asoka (reign from 268BC-232BC) (Kemper, 1991). As part of this vision, the UNP government resurrected



the classic arrangement of the tank, temple, and paddy field (*vava, dāgaba, jāya*) as symbolic of ideal village life within a ‘righteous society’. Spencer explains that this imagery of tank, temple and paddy field emerged from the writings of the eminent Sri Lankan writer Martin Wickramasinghe (Spencer, 2013). Wickramasinghe’s nationalistic view of the rural way of life and the ideal morality of villagers entered into political discourse making the tank, temple and paddy field representations of a past ‘righteous society’ that would shape the present and the future. The UNP government attempted to propagate this imagery to create a ‘righteous society’ through the process of development. Tennekoon refers to the building of the ‘great temple of Mahavæli’ (Mahavæli *maha saya*) on the banks of Kotmalē reservoir, at the starting point of the Mahavæli irrigation system, as a powerful symbolic statement of this intent (Tennekoon, 1988). Kemper discusses this arrangement as an attempt to create an identity that was locally nurtured to counteract the influence of the long period of colonisation on the island (Kemper, 1991). The link between the state and Buddhism that was dispersed during the colonial period was reinstated providing the foundation for a new phase of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism on the island (Spencer 2013; Seneviratne 1999; Kemper 1991).

The geographical area that came under the MDP was claimed as ‘the heartland of the Sinhala’ (Ekanayake, 1984). The area is illustrated on the map (figure two) below. The section highlighted in green on the map is where the MDP was first implemented and is termed as System H. Divulvæva is part of System H. The relocation and resettlement of a large number of people, which Muggah claims to have been more than five percent of the country’s population, is also seen as an encroachment of Sinhala nationalism where Sinhalese people were settled in Tamil and Muslim dominant regions to form a buffer zone between the more Sinhala populated South and the Tamil dominated North (Muggah, 2008). It is for this reason that the MDP is highlighted as a root cause of the civil war that blighted the island (Spencer, 1990c). Rather than enhancing the quality of life in the dry zone, the MDP disrupted village life by destroying the tanks and acquiring and redistributing land that was central to the old order of village life.

Figure 2 The Geographical Area of the MDP



Muggah claims that the settlers were engulfed by poverty and a deterioration of their quality of life as issues related to compensation, land acquisition and redistribution emerged in the operation of the MDP (Muggah, 2008). Unlike the idealised model of a past in which a village was formed by a group of kin who shared a paddy field and water from a tank, under the MDP, people were settled randomly into communities from different castes and different places. Land and water were no longer attached to the village. Plots of paddy were redistributed after state acquisition by drawing lots. This often resulted in a plot of paddy being situated far away from the village where the owner lived. Water, was not under the control of the community of a village but a resource that the MDP was responsible for and controlled. When researching in a newly settled village that she calls Atirēkabōgagama in System H, de Zoysa claims that she found rather than a 'righteous village society', an aberrant village society with a venal culture of alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, homicide and political factions (de Zoysa, 1995a, p. 13). This was the situation that Punchibanda alluded to in his recollection of village life in former times.

Researching in System H, Sørensen refer to the so called 'beneficiaries' of MDP as 'victims of development' and as 'displaced people' (Sørensen, 1996, pp. 1–2). She narrates the experiences of those who had voluntarily chosen to come to live in System H, those who had been uprooted and resettled in System H, and the second generation of 'beneficiaries' who experienced relocation in an indirect and mediated manner (Sørensen, 1996). Sørensen's second type of 'victims' would be similar to Punchibanda with whom I started this chapter. These were people who had to give up their ancestral lands and *chena* lands to fit into the conditions of the MDP which was to own 2.5 acres of paddy land and half acre of homestead. This contributed to a feeling of 'having lost a way of life and a sense of identity'. These changes impacted significantly on social relationships and ruptured traditional patterns of social status based on ownership of land (Sørensen, 1996, pp. 211–212). Furthermore, these people watched the landscape that they had lived in for years transformed as new villages, roads, canals and paddy fields erased the wild forests, tanks, and villages they knew. Sørensen suggests that, to gain credibility and improve their position, villagers re-asserted the cultural traditions and values which rooted their identity in the locality (Sørensen, 1996). This invention of tradition was not just about the past but was also forward looking and an attempt to secure villager's futures by building a collective identity in a context of what was being experienced as social disintegration

(Sørensen, 1996, p. 213). She further suggests that the youth, who formed a second generation of beneficiaries, lacked access to land and hence became wage-labourers to earn a living (Sørensen, 1996). As a consequence, they became economically independent of their kin and focused exclusively on their own families and households (Sørensen, 1996). What is of relevance for the account developed in this thesis is linked to the role and meaning given to the households as the basic social unit in the MDP (Sørensen, 1996).

Another important study of System H of the MDP was conducted by Perera (1985). In his account development and economic changes are seen to have transformed villages into a 'community of choice' rather than a 'community of fate' (Perera, 1985, p. 181). He explains that the MDP policy of distributing land to the landless contributed to fundamental changes to the structures of power and status in villages (Perera, 1985). One important effect was that a money economy replaced the subsistence economy of the traditional village. Political patronage also became an important factor in obtaining status and power in the village and villagers' identities and values became re-defined according to new social relationships and value systems (Perera, 1992). He explains that though different economic categories emerged they lacked the kind of class consciousness that might manifest in group action (Perera, 1985). The landless labourers competed for tenancies and looked out for their self-interests rather than developing a collective interest (Perera, 1985). The salaried and the businessmen acted as agents between the village and the outside world and were among the biggest landlords in the village (Perera, 1985). Their education, contacts with officials in towns and mobility placed them well above the others and allowed them to dominate party political networks and control rural organisations (Perera, 1985). In this manner, the changing patterns of land distribution in system H impacted on the social stratification in villages.

Analysing women's experience of life in the NCP's system H, Schrijvers explains how women are marginalised in development planning subjected to cultural stereotypes (Schrijvers, 1985). She claims that the development in the NCP during colonial and post-colonial times had influenced and worsened the situation of women by emphasising their status as mothers (Schrijvers, 1985). Women as mothers were made responsible for bringing up children, but in trying to carry out this task they became dependent on husbands and other male relatives, whose economic contribution has become highly questionable (Schrijvers, 1985). Women's lesser freedom of movement and lesser access

to meaningful economic livelihoods restricted their economic and social independence (Schrijvers, 1985). This created an economic vulnerability among women that was reinforced by a 'bourgeois' ideology of 'male breadwinners' and 'female housewives' (Schrijvers, 1985). Nevertheless, Schrijvers describes how women coped with their vulnerabilities by attempting to become financially independent and supporting one another in the form of village organizations (Schrijvers, 1985). Thus, the status of housewife and mother served as both a source of dependence on men and hence vulnerability, and as a source of power. Although women were in large part restricted to the household their roles as housewives and mothers also gave women an important degree of agency within the household, with men becoming dependent on them (Schrijvers, 1985). Considering women's lives in households in the MDP I will next introduce Divulvæva and illustrate how constructing relationships in everyday life in the village contributes to this duality of power and vulnerability of women.

## **The Village Divulvæva**

Divulvæva being a *purāna* village had a village tank, a paddy field and a temple long before the arrival of the MDP.<sup>5</sup> It was a typical village of the kind envisioned by the UNP government's 'righteous society'. The villagers claimed that their ancestors took up residence in the area by clearing it for cultivation and building a tank for water. The village tank was part of a cascade system that was disrupted by the MDP but is still partly visible. The village temple is an ancient one with an origin story linking it to the patronage of a king. The temple is located on top of a rock, which is the highest point in the area. The name 'Divulvæva' is a pseudonym, chosen because of the many wood apple trees (*divul*) and the village tank (*væva*). In my pseudonym, the interdependence between the tank and village is preserved as the village's original name has in it the term *væva* meaning tank, rather than *gama*, which means village. The tank came to be because of the need for water to cultivate the lands to sustain the villagers; the village developed because of the tank collecting rainwater for the use of the villagers.

When I arrived at the village, its physical structure was similar to any planned, newly established village of the MDP. The village had acres of paddy fields bordering it on either side. These are shown in figure three below as the green patchwork surrounding the

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<sup>5</sup> *Purana* literally meaning ancient, also means that the ancestors of the villagers established the village.

village. On one side the canal dug by the MDP to take water from the Nava Jaya Ganga to paddy fields surrounding the village and beyond formed another boundary<sup>6</sup>. Meanwhile, the village tank formed yet another one. The waters of the tank are now stagnant because they are not used as much as in the past as the preference is now for the flowing water of the divisional canal. The tiny white dots amidst the green foliage mark the houses.

*Figure 3 Google Satellite Map of Divulvæva*



The width and breadth of Divulvæva were explained to me with the help of its eight roads, which are a significant feature in organising the village and creating a sense of a village community. Figure four below illustrates these eight roads, which border the 250 odd houses that shelter the villagers of Divulvæva. The oldest part of the village is called *gammædhda* which the villagers consider to be the centre of the village. The houses in this area are closely situated and have no home gardens. The MDP could not divide the land in *gammædhda* to 0.5 acres as they did elsewhere because the houses were closely situated,

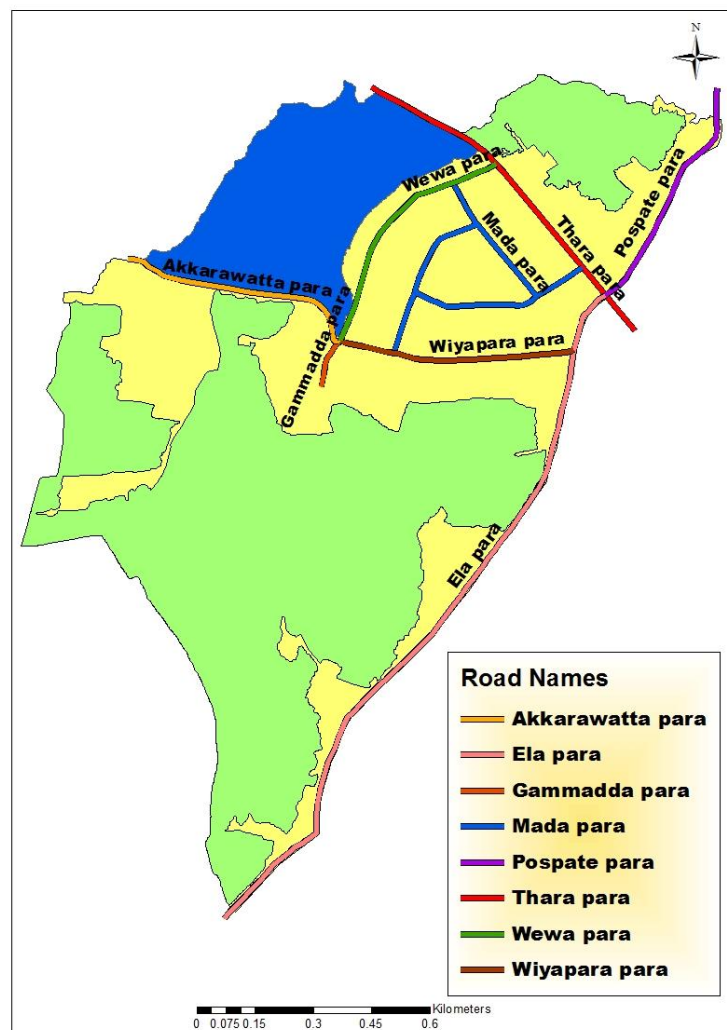
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<sup>6</sup> Nava Jaya Ganga is a newly dug deep canal by the MDP to take water through the divisional canals to paddy fields in the area.



and the owners of those households did not want to give up their houses. For this reason, *gammadhda* was left as it was but the houses had been modernised using bricks with tiled roofs when I saw them. The ancient structure of a house with a verandah, two rooms and a granary that Yalman describes as a typical village dwelling were not to be seen (Yalman, 1967). Indeed, I was very enthusiastically shown the only existing granary (*atuva*) by the villagers in *gammadhda*. The house that owned the granary was said to be one of the first five families that established the village. Those who lived in *gammadhda* are considered to be the descendants from the earliest settlers of the village. At *gammadhda*, there is a mango tree, which serves as a notice board in the eyes of the villagers - this is the symbolic centre of the village. For example, at times when the villagers needed to condemn others' actions, they would pin a public proclamation called a *kala pathtaraya* on this tree. Because of its location right at the junction where four roads meet, many who pass by can see the poster.

Figure 4 The Road Network in the Village



The other three roads that connect at the four-way junction in *gammædhda* are called *væva pāra*, *vyapāra* and *akḥkaravathṭa pāra*. The names given to each of the eight roads tells the history of the village. For instance, *akḥkaravathṭa* was formed across the village tank as shown on the map in figure four when the children of the early settlers did not find enough space to build houses in *gammædhda*. *Vyapāra* was the first tarred road in the village built in 1952 as a result of political patronage from the UNP government under the late Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake. This was one of the post-colonial development schemes that came to the NCP before MDP. *Vyapāra* then connects to *æla pāra*, which falls along the canal (*æla*) built by the MDP linking the next development phase of the NCP with the inauguration of the Mahavæli H system. *Æla pāra* leads to *veherahandhiya* the furthest lot of households from the village centre. Those in *veherahandhiya* are mostly new settlers who have migrated from elsewhere to the area. The houses in *veherahandhiya* are situated further apart than anywhere else in the village as there are many paddy fields at that end. Across the main road, the canal continues parallel to the *æla pāra*. Bringing the history up to date the *æla pāra* became the *phosphate pāra*, across the main road, as it leads to the State Phosphate Factory which opened in the 1980s and is a major local employer. The main bus road is called the *tāra pāra*, which means the ‘tarred road’. The houses on either side of the *tāra pāra* belong to the village up until *væva pāra*, which is the road that goes into the village parallel to the tank. The internal roads that connect to *vyapāra*, *væva pāra* and *tāra pāra* are called *mæda pāra* meaning the ‘middle road’.

Villagers told me that the village had become ‘new’ (*aluthvelā*) now with new infrastructures such as the roads and the canal. They claimed that people were not as poor (*duppath*) as they were before because everyone had a modern house in some stage of development. Everyone now aspires to complete a house with brick walls, tiled floors and proper roofs with roof tiles or asbestos sheets, which are often important markers of wealth and status. The explanation of the village being ‘new’ with reference to roads, the canal and houses made me realise that village life is now linked to roads, the canal and the houses instead of tanks and paddy fields. Roads and canals are important to the people of Divulvæva because those who live along the roads and use the canal have a strong sense of community. This was reinforced on a daily basis in the performance of activities such as washing clothes, cleaning machinery, bathing, washing livestock and visiting one another’s houses for meals, borrowing items and asking for general assistance. A comment from Mādhavi illustrates a sense of the *badima* that come from this mutuality.



In conversation, she referred to her mother as a relative of Nandasiri. However, there was no obvious affinal or descent relationship between the two. When Lakshmi pointed this out to her, Mādhavi said ‘those who live close to one another on the same road are relatives’ (*eka pāre eka langa jivath vena aya nādayo tamai*). Whereas in an earlier time social relations might have been formed around the cultivation of adjacent plots in a paddy field and sharing water, the relationships among villagers are now built along roads, the canal and houses. However, I should highlight that in the past as I explained earlier, in the *gammādhda*, the villagers lived in one lot of households built closely together that could then signify the intimacy of their relationships in comparison to the relationships formed by living on the same road in 0.5-acre plots marked by fences and gates in the new shape of the village.

Women who live along the same road have formed informal groups as well as formal Women’s Societies (*kaṇṭa samithi*). The informal groups composed of a few women who lived nearby, who visit each other often and had the practice to get together in one house in the afternoons to chat. Being part of such informal groups helped me to gain deeper insight into their everyday lives. The more formal groups, commonly known as *samithi*, consist of about 12 to 15 women who lived along the same road. These formal groups had appointed executive committees and monthly meetings in a member’s house. The *samithi* even had a common fund to help one another at events such as puberty ceremonies, weddings, alms-giving ceremonies and funerals in their homes. Each of these events in Sinhala culture requires much labour to cook for a large number of visitors. Belonging to a *samithi* enabled the women to co-operate and share labour at such events. Furthermore, these Societies provided credit for women for interest that was used as a method to generate an income for the Society. This facility in the Societies assisted women in financial difficulties. Manjulā explained the benefit of credit facilities from Societies: ‘I had lots of financial problems. It is from the credit that I got from the Women’s Societies that I managed. Now things are better for me; I am paying the debt I took and slowly closing the holes in my pot’. She was indicating that her life was similar to a pot with holes because of the debt she had to pay - now she is slowly paying back the money and therefore closing the holes in her pot. Moreover, the Dēdunu Women’s Society (of which I was an honorary member) even had a practice to get together to visit a member’s house when some calamity befell them. For instance, when Mādhavi’s daughter fell ill, all the women in the Society visited her house with a packet of biscuits and a Nestomalt. In this

manner, the groups of women along roads cultivated a *badima* that assisted them when necessary.

The women that formed informal groups would take a set of clothes and sometimes a basket of laundry to wash, and then walk or ride on scooters to the canal or tank together. Going to the canal was a very exciting activity for the women. They said to me that the water is healthy and fresh rather than the water in their homes which is hard (*kivulai*). They would wear a bathing sarong (*diya redda*) to cover their body from under arms to ankles and immerse in the water. It was a mystery to me how they managed to change clothes in public before and after taking a bath. I was told it is a skill that took years of practice. It did seem a good way to cool down the body in the hot sun in the dry zone. On many afternoons I accompanied women to the canal and conversed with them there. I would sit on the steps leading to the water (*mankada*) with only my feet dipped in and interacted with the women. It was a busy place with many women bathing, washing laundry, and bathing children. It was also a place of joy as they would share jokes and chat about their lives. They always ridiculed me for not getting into the water; Līla an elderly woman in her 60s, jokingly said, ‘there are no canals in Colombo, so you do not know to bath here’. Jayavati, another elderly woman, then said ‘come here; I will bathe you, don’t worry you are like my daughter’. I just shook my head as vigorously as I could to indicate that I could not be persuaded to bathe in the canal. I watched from my safe seat on the steps as Shānti scrubbed Līla’s back with a round stone. Jayavati was helped again by Shānti to wring bed sheets that she was washing. They shared basins, washing detergent and soap. Līla shouted to me while putting soap on Shānti’s back ‘we are all relatives here!’ (*api okkoma nayo nē!*) and I nodded in agreement with a smile.

Moreover, common village events are also organised along the roads. For example, in 2015, the village organised a cricket match between teams representing the different roads for the village *Avurudu Uthsavaya* (New Year festival held to commemorate Sinhala Tamil New Year in April every year). Unfortunately, the festival could not be held in 2016 because of the heat wave in NCP during April. In the year before, there had been a male team and a female team from each road competing separately. Shānti who played for the *tāra pāra* women’s team said ‘everyone from our road was cheering us on; I could feel the excitement in my heart, I cannot put into words that feeling. We were bound together as a team’.

The functioning of the village Death Donation Society (*maranādhara samithiya*) is also organised around the roads. The Society was established in 1977 to organize funerals in the village. By 2015/2016 the society had become the most potent village association, and it extended its authority beyond funerals to other aspects of village life. For instance, the society managed a water filter facility that was donated to the village by an Old Boy's Association of a boy's school in Colombo. The money generated from the facility was accumulated in the Society's common fund to be used for communal events in the village. The two reasons given for its extension of power in the village is its majority membership and political patronage. In the event of a funeral, every household had to contribute a coconut, a cup (*sēruwa*) of rice and 150 rupees (GBP 0.75). Various tasks of the funeral are divided along the village road network. One main task was to cook meals for the funeral house for up to three days. Women from different roads are asked to perform this task in rotation. I recall how the women in *māda pāra* got together to cook lunch for their co-villager Mālani's funeral who at 49 suddenly passed away due to a heart attack.

All the women from the households in *māda pāra* arrived at the compound that belonged to the Death Donation Society. The community hall equipped with all the necessities to cook was crowded with women working and laughing. A shed outside the community hall had four large hearths ablaze creating a lot of smoke that the women did not seem to mind. When I arrived at the community hall the women were engaged in preparation for the meal; some were chopping vegetables, some were scraping coconut, some were cleaning sweet potatoes, and others were cleaning fish. Figure five below illustrates the women working together to cook the meal. The menu for lunch was white rice, cabbage curry, fish curry, papadam and sweet potato curry. Everyone seemed to be in high spirits laughing and cracking jokes. Some elderly women were sitting on a bench and supervised the cooking shouting advice from time to time. The women who considered each other close because of being kin or neighbours worked together in groups. Mallika said 'we cooked fish last time we can't do it again this time and have the stench in our hands. We will cook cabbage today'. The 'we' that Mallika referred to are her informal group of women who had got together to be responsible for one curry. Another group of women got together and made tea for everyone. The tasks were taken up by women in informal groups, and together they worked to achieve their obligation of cooking a full meal for the funeral house. It has to be noted that the quantities involved in this meal were gigantic

as it had to be enough to feed all the villagers and any other visitors from outside the village. The task would have been impossible to achieve without the *badima* that the women had cultivated.

*Figure 5 Women from mada pāra Cooking for a Funeral House in the Village*



However, this picture of women working together to achieve a common task for the village is not without tensions. The treasurer of the Death Donation Society brought bread and *pol sambol* (spicy coconut) for everyone. The rush to get bread and *pol sambol* astonished me, and the women took more than necessary without thinking of others. The display of solidarity while cooking all the while was lost when food was served. Some women shouted at others for taking more than needed saying ‘are you taking for your whole family? Leave some for the rest of us’. The food for the funeral house was already

prepared and being packed into large, plastic baskets. A lorry arrived to take the food baskets to the funeral house. The few men who were around, loaded the baskets onto the lorry. Everyone left the premises without cleaning the dirty utensils and vegetable debris that littered the floor of the hall. When I inquired about cleaning later from the secretary of the Death Donation Society, he said that he and a few of the committee members cleaned the premises afterwards. He further said: 'they come to get away with the 500 rupees fine (GBP2.50), there is no feeling'. His statement undermined the *bādima* of the women and indicated that the work is only achieved due to the rules and regulations of the Death Donation Society. However, as I realised with further exploration and experience with these women, it is the existence of the *bādima* among them that allows the Death Donation Society to function in the village. The formalities imposed by formal organizations such as the Death Donation Society are only achieved because of the informal groupings among women who live along the road network. Therefore, though Punchibanda and elders like him claimed the village to be decaying in morality which represents the breakdown of kinship, what I experienced is how women in their roles as caregivers extend their responsibilities to the level of the village and keep village life integrated even amidst ruptures. In the next section, I move from the community to the household by way of a household survey I undertook in Divulvæva. The survey data will provide a picture beyond the roads, inside households to lay the background to the women's everyday problems that I will elaborate in the rest of the thesis.

### *Households*

At the time of my fieldwork, the village population was just over a thousand individuals spread across 256 households. The community was homogeneous in terms of caste, ethnicity and religion. I was told that everyone was 'govigama, Sinhala, Buddhist people' (*govigama, Sinhala baudda minissu tamai me gamē innē*). I undertook a household survey as a way to introduce myself to the community and to obtain a clear picture of the demographics of the village. A copy of my survey questionnaire is attached as Appendix 2. From the total number of households, I could only survey 235 households as the residents of some households were not available to be surveyed during the times that I visited. From the 235 households, I have gathered information on 963 individuals in the village. Table one below gives the age and gender distribution of these 963 individuals. In terms of gender, 482 of the total population surveyed were males while 481 were females.

The village appears to be a ‘young’ village as 33 percent of its inhabitants are between the ages of 21-40 years with 32 percent in the village below the age of 20. There are 77 individuals above the age of 60; that is 8 percent of the total population surveyed. The character of the village being ‘young’ contributed to the type of problems in the village and in the household that I will detail in the following chapters.

*Table 1 Age & Gender Distribution in the Village*

Age	Males	Females	Total	Percentage
Less than a year	8	9	17	2
1-10	67	83	150	16
11-20	81	65	146	15
21-30	77	77	154	16
31-40	94	73	167	17
41-50	61	68	129	13
51-60	51	63	114	12
61-70	27	25	52	5
71-80	8	8	16	2
81-90	3	6	9	1
91-100	1	0	1	0
Did not know the age	4	4	8	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>963</b>	<b>100</b>

Considering the 0.5 acre homesteads given by the MDP to build houses, table two below illustrates the nature of homesteads in terms of inheritance, buying, sharing, renting or living in the original homestead. From all the households surveyed, 104 households indicated that the present residents were children or grandchildren of the original MDP benefactors who had inherited the homestead. Forty-three families shared their 0.5-acre homestead with extended family creating compounds similar to those Leach found in Pul Eliya (Leach, 1961). Forty-four households were built on land bought from MDP benefactors or their descendants against the MDP law that declared the land to be non-transferable and non-dividable. Only 40 households claimed to be occupied by original beneficiaries of the MDP living in their 0.5-acre homesteads. Four houses were given for rent.

*Table 2 Ownership of Homestead*

<b>Homestead</b>	<b>Number of houses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Inherited 0.5 acres and house	104	44
Bought homestead and built house	44	19
House built in a shared homestead	43	18
Renting a house	4	2
Built house in the given MDP 0.5-acre homestead	40	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of household composition, the arrangement in most was a husband, wife and children living in a nuclear family type arrangement rather than in multi-occupancy and extended households. As Punchibanda bemoaned, most couples tend to build their own houses after marriage and move away from the parents' house. This practice was encouraged by MDP policy which gave land to each married couple to build a house. Such practice has continued and has created 160 nuclear-type households which emerged after the MDP began giving out half-acre plots. Table three below illustrates the distribution of household types in Divulvæva.

*Table 3 Types of Households in the Village*

<b>Type of household</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Nuclear Residence	160	68
Extended Residence	65	28
Living alone	10	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100</b>

Extended residences were ones where children and maybe their elderly parents were living. Although many nuclear-type households were formed because of the MDP land distribution, many came about because of disputes. For instance, Mādhavi explained her

reason for living in a nuclear-type household but sharing the homestead with her mother in law, Premalatā, in the following terms:

She was always poking fingers in our matters. Suranga started to fight with me because she told tales to him about me. This is when I fought with her and left to a house on rent. After they gave us this piece of land, we built this house with the money my mother gave. But, still, she tells everyone that they built the house for us.

The occupants of the ten households in which people lived alone included an elderly man, a woman whose children lived close by in a separate household, as well as separated and unmarried middle-aged men. In several of these cases of lone occupancy, there was the suggestion of familial disputes as the cause. Being a young village, the suggested disputes were mostly related to marital problems. For instance, I was told that Laksiri who lived alone in his house in *tāra pāra* was separated from his wife and child because of a suspected extramarital relationship. The wife and child had moved to her parents' village after a series of disputes. The emergence of nuclear-type households has meant that the woman of the household has no other elderly woman within the house, like a mother or mother in law to preside over her. This means that the woman in a household has sole responsibility to care for the house and its occupants, giving space for others to directly blame the woman for any failures in her expected responsibility. Such expectation has contributed to the extension of a woman's role from caregiver to that of providing for the household. The land problems in Divulvæva that I explain next will exemplify how the process of 'responsibilisation' operates in this context (Trnka and Trundle, 2015).

### *Emerging Landlessness*

By distributing land to only married couples any child who was not married but nearing the age of marriage did not qualify for MDP land. For instance, if a family at the time of the land distribution had five children and the eldest was about 17 years of age, he would not have received land. In a year or two when he was married and having his own family, there was no land for him to build a home or cultivate. In such instances children had the option to apply for Mahavæli land from elsewhere in System H. As a result, some children moved into new villages bordering Divulvæva that were established by the MDP. Though the children previously had that option, at present there is no remaining land to distribute



in the area. In addition, it should be said that most youths in the village below the age of 20 did not want to work in the paddy fields under the hot sun. Instead, they aspired to secure employment in public or private sector offices. However, owing to the competitiveness of examinations in the country most youth fail to qualify for the secondary education that is essential for securing the kind of employment they desired. As a result, most youths in the village spend their time idling and depending on their parents to provide for them. Therefore, the emerging landlessness is impacting on the parents who have to find ways to provide for themselves as well as their adult children.

A contributing factor of landlessness is the practice of mortgaging and selling paddy land by MDP benefactors. The benefactors have mortgaged or sold their land to solve their financial issues against the rules of the MDP. When attempting to find the correct owners, the MDP is confronted by people who have come to own the land through a mortgage settlement or sale by the original benefactor. When I interviewed the Land Officer at the Eppawala MDP Block office, she said:

MDP land is for the farming class (*govi panthiya*). But, various businessmen (*mudalali*) have acquired the land now because people have sold the land illegally to them. We include a clause even on the deeds that the land cannot be sold because it is state land and also to prevent the land being sold to the wealthy and away from the farming class. The clause of having one owner for the 2.5 acres of paddy land was also to ensure that the paddy land would not be divided into smaller portions.

She further said:

When we have to give the deed, we inquire whether the land has been mortgaged or sold, and if it has, the actual family to whom we gave the land has to pay back because we will only give the deed to the benefactor family. Sometimes the people who bought the land lose the money and the land.

Those who bought MDP land in Divulvæva were mostly newcomers who came to settle in the village from elsewhere on the island. They had bought paddy land as well as homesteads from original MDP benefactors or their children. Others like Punchibanda who had inherited wealth had bought land from fellow villagers when they sold land to

solve financial problems. Some have accumulated land by giving credit in return for a mortgage. They do not own the land legally but would accumulate wealth by cultivating the land as well as by taking interest from the given credit. Those who have accumulated land in this manner are presently the landed aristocracy. As a result of losing land by selling or mortgaging, some villagers live in a deplorable state working as tenant farmers. The tenancy agreement with the landowners adds to their plight because the share that is to be given to the landowner is decided before harvesting. For instance, the tenant farmer would promise the landowner 20 bushels of rice at the beginning of the season. Then due to bad weather or harm to crops by animals, his harvest could be less than expected. Nevertheless, he will still be liable to give the 20 bushels to the landowner even if that is his whole harvest ultimately leaving nothing for him. I was explained of this unfairness in contrast to the fair tenancy agreement in the past where the share was decided as a tithe of the full harvest, such as a half or a quarter of the harvest rather than a number of bushels. As a consequence of this system of land acquisition, a hierarchy based on land ownership has emerged in the village rather than the equal society that was imagined by the implementers of the MDP.

The hierarchy can be explained by the different ownership patterns of paddy land I found in Divulvæva. Table four below summarises my findings. I found only 49 households, who were original beneficiaries of the MDP, farming their 2.5 acres. From that, 21 households said that they had given their paddy land on tenancy. These households were mostly original beneficiaries of the MDP who have aged and were unable to undertake to farm anymore. Tenancy for them was an excellent way to earn an income in old age. Thirty-seven households claimed to have inherited land from their parents or grandparents and were cultivating that land. Fifty-seven households said that they informally share the paddy land with their siblings, which originally belonged to their parents or grandparents. The villagers spoke of siblings that share paddy land as very united because they have been able to work the field without any disputes. I was told of a family with seven siblings who had divided the 2.5 acres of paddy land and were each cultivating a  $1/7^{\text{th}}$  of it. Another method of sharing is by taking turns and cultivating paddy land in rotation. One sibling cultivates in *maha* season (which literally translates as 'big season' when most paddy cultivation is done), and the other cultivates in *yala* season (literally the 'lesser' season due to less rain which compels farmers to shift to chena cultivation or less water-reliant crops rather than paddy cultivation). Some families allow one sibling to cultivate the field and share the harvest, giving a more significant share to

the one who cultivated to compensate for his labour. Seven households have bought 2.5 acres of paddy land to farm on from original MDP beneficiaries or their children or grandchildren. And, 85 households in the village claimed that they had no paddy land of their own to cultivate.

*Table 4 Ownership of Paddy Land*

<b>Paddy Land</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
MDP 2.5 acres	49	21
Inherited MDP 2.5 acres	37	16
Sharing MDP 2.5 acres	57	24
Bought MDP 2.5 acres	7	3
Landless	85	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100</b>
<b><i>Andē</i> (Tenancy)</b>		
Works only on <i>andē</i>	18	37
Works on <i>andē</i> in addition to having their land	9	19
Land owned given on <i>andē</i>	21	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Mortgaged land</b>		
The land they own has been mortgaged	5	36
Working only on land mortgaged to them	6	43
Works on mortgaged land in addition to having their land	3	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>

From the 85 landless households, eighteen households claimed to be farming on tenancy. Nine households said that they work on tenancy as well as their own paddy land. In terms of mortgaged land, five households said that they had to mortgage their paddy land for financial emergencies and lived by labouring. Six households worked on land mortgaged to them, whilst having income generated from interest on credit. They had wealth

generated from businesses in the village or in the nearby town which they used to give loans. Three households claimed that they work on their own land as well as land mortgaged to them indicating that they too are generating a reasonable income. Therefore, from the 85 households that claimed to be landless, 18 works on tenancy leaving 67 households which are in a genuinely poor state. A conversation I had with some women who worked as agricultural labourers in paddy fields exemplified the desperate state of landless households in the MDP and how it burdened the woman.

Piyasiri introduced me to Vimal whose trishaw I hired to go around the area when needed. Once when I visited Vimal's paddy field during harvesting season, the women who were cutting paddy explained their problems due to landlessness. I was introduced by Vimal to the women as 'this *nangi* is researching our village'. After hearing of my research work, one woman asked me if I knew ways to eradicate poverty. I replied, 'isn't MDP implemented to eradicate poverty?' Another woman answered, 'the land will not grow as much as children, miss' (*idama loku vennē nā nē miss lamai inna taramata*). This statement indicated that they have become poorer because of the number of children they had. Once the 0.5-acre homestead is divided among the children, it becomes less and less when passed down from one generation to the other. One woman described how there were now three households in their homestead after the children got married. I asked the women whether their husband's work. One said: 'my man had attained nirvana' (*apē manussaya nivan gihin*) and everyone laughed at her statement. Her response implied that the man was dead. However, I came to know that the man was not dead at all but a drunkard who was good for nothing. As far as she was concerned, he may well have been dead. A second woman said, 'my man has his head in the mud all day long' (*apē manussaya mati godē oluwa obā gaththa gaman mai*) indicating that he is making bricks for a living. The third woman said that her husband was too ill to work. The fact that none of their husbands worked on paddy land meant that they did not have paddy land probably because it was mortgaged or sold to make ends meet. Under these circumstances, the women had to find extra work and sell their labour to earn something each day to support the family. The conversation with them exemplified the everyday problems in the households within the MDP that burden the women of the household. The woman's responsibility as caregiver is extended to that of provider under these challenging circumstances. The inability of their husbands to provide enough for the family has sometimes led men to take refuge in alcohol, which further burdens the woman. In order

to keep the household integrated the women have opted to find work close to home. Further discussion of how women attempt to keep the house integrated under difficult circumstances will be discussed in chapter four. However, with the emerging landlessness the villagers engaged in a range of other occupations to generate an income.

### *Livelihoods*

The village of Divulvæva houses a young population. Most men and women were of an age where they could work to generate an income. From the total 963 individuals surveyed, 702 were above the age of 18 and eligible to work. From the 702, 26 percent claimed that they were unemployed. Table five below shows various employments of men and women of Divulvæva.

*Table 5 Employment in the Village*

<b>Employment</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Farming Only	110	88	198	28
Farming and Other Employments	28	6	34	5
Military & Police	41	8	49	7
Self Employed	48	20	68	10
Public Sector	50	33	83	12
Private Sector	33	11	44	6
Foreign Employment	14	17	31	4
Not Employed	32	147	179	26
Temporary Work	11	5	16	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>100</b>

In the ‘not employed’ category there were 147 women who claimed to be financially dependent on their husband’s and were mainly looking after house and children. This situation can be attributed to the fact that most households are made up of couples that have young children to look after. For this reason, women tend to be restricted to household duties and the man is the sole provider in the household. The 12 percent employed in the public sector were mostly attached to the State phosphate factory where they engaged in mining phosphate. Seven percent of the village were employed with the

military or the police. Foreign migration for employment is significantly less at 4 percent compared to the high trend of migration reported in the country. Farming was a livelihood for 33 percent of the villagers whilst 41 percent made living by other kinds of employments. However, as 74 percent of the villagers were in some sort of employment it could be said that the socio-economic levels of Divulvæva is in a good state. The relatively good state of the village economies has led Knipe *et al.* to suggest it to be a reason for the low level of suicide and self-harm in a village (Knipe *et al.*, 2018). They further state that suicide and self-harm is less likely in ‘individual’s living in households with several generations’ (Knipe *et al.*, 2018, p. 182). However, there was no reports of suicide and self-harm in Divulvæva during my fieldwork where most families lived in nuclear-typed households. This situation rather contradicts Knipe’s observation. In consequence, it could be said that factors leading for outcomes such as suicide or self-harm is more complex than mere residential patterns or socio-economic statuses. In this thesis I offer some explanations as to how villagers might develop resilience in the face of everyday problems. Specifically, I will consider the role of women’s social networks outside of their households as important sources of support.

## Concluding Reflections

Growing landlessness have been said to be the main reason for disintegration of villages (Tambiah, 1955; Morrison, Moore and Lebbe, 1979). In contrary to this Punchibanda claims that it is the distribution of land that caused Divulvæva to lose its solidarity. Development initiatives in the guise of ‘colonisation schemes’ have been shown to have impacted negatively on village life and even family life (de Zoysa, 1995a). Some have reasoned that the disintegration in village life is because of land problems while others have said it is because of water (Peiris, 1978; Gunawardena, 1981; Samaraweera, 1981; Silva and Vidanapathirana, 1984; Pfaffenberger, 1990). As a result, *purana* villages that are a collective of kin have experienced particular kinds of conflict (Brow, 1996). De Munck argues, referring to elsewhere on the island, that the demands of a capitalist economy ruptured the ideology of kinship, as kinship ties based on land tenure broke down and the need to maintain kinship relations decreased (de Munck, 1997, 1999). Pfaffenberger has illustrated that the failure to incorporate cultural values when implementing new technologies for agriculture is the reason for their failure in rural Sri Lanka (Pfaffenberger, 1990). Winslow’s account of the potter village of Walangama in the northwest coast of

Sri Lanka serves as an example of a success story where cultural values are incorporated with new technologies (Winslow, 2009). She discusses that the villagers harness the power of kinship and memory to uphold integration within the community (Winslow, 2009). For instance, a successful potter will let a young potter borrow his machines and give him advice on the business because he remembers his humble beginnings (Winslow, 2009). Nevertheless, what I have illustrated is that this discourse of village life is produced in the absence of female voices and experience of village life.

Past integration along the lines of land and water, which Punchibanda laments the loss of, is a male conceptualisation of village life. The working of land and sharing of water were instances of male interaction that then contributed to how village life was formulated. Women were set apart from this interaction. For instance, the harvesting rituals (*kola paganava*) are a classic example of how visions of integrated village life in the past excluded women. The threshing floor (*kamata*) was considered sacred, and only men could step on it. I am told that women were allowed only to bring food and leave it at the edge of the threshing floor while the men continued threshing from sundown till sunrise. The ritual signifies male interaction as they pile up their harvest around the threshing floor and thresh their harvest, taking turns all through the night. This ritual is no longer practised with the coming of new technologies that allow threshing to be done within a few hours by machines. Hence, spaces for male integration have been lost in the MDP villages with the coming of new technologies. Women, on the other hand, are contributing to the integration of village life with their everyday practices.

De Zoysa explaining changes in social relations within village life in a newly settled MDP village that she calls Athirēkabōgagama (nb. literally ‘cash crop village’) in Mahavæli System H, acknowledges that the villages are growing in individualism, urbanisation, male alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, homicide and political subversion (de Zoysa, 1995a, p. 13). She claims the villages to be aberrant societies where there is ‘social decomposition’ (de Zoysa, 1995a). Within such aberrant societies, she claims that women have been empowered because of the feminization of agriculture, ability to migrate to the Middle East for employment, and free education (de Zoysa, 1995a). By bringing the woman into the limelight, de Zoysa acknowledges that empowerment has burdened the woman and extended her responsibilities as much as creating a sense of stability (de Zoysa, 1995a). Similarly, in Divulvæva women operating along roads and the canal, and

between houses have created an interaction that preserves village life. The forming of informal and formal women's groups and the women's contribution to village societies such as the Death Donation Society are instances illustrating this interaction formed by women. As a result, women have become different kinds of actors in village life and family life. I will further explore this claim in this thesis by zooming into household spaces and family lives to show how women work to achieve this.



## Chapter 3

### Tying of Two and More: Marriage and Elopement in Divulvæva

During my survey, I visited a house with my friend Anushā. The mother of the household told of how her 16-year old daughter had tried to ingest pesticide after an argument with her. She said the bottle luckily had expired, and hence the poison was not lethal enough to kill her daughter. When I asked what led to the argument the mother said that the quarrel was about doing household chores. Later, when we left the house and were walking along a quiet path, Anushā told me, ‘that woman lied to you. The girl drank poison because the mother objected to her love relationship (*ādara sambandaya*). She is not a good girl you know; she is a ripened girl (*pabichca kellek*). That girl has so many affairs with boys; I tell you she will elope soon with someone. Didn’t you see the way she was lulling her baby sister to sleep, like a mature woman (*ammandi*)?’ In Anushā’s judgement when a girl behaves in ways beyond her age, she is considered to have entered womanhood before her time as indicated by her use of the terms ‘mature woman’ or ‘ripened girl’. True to Anushā’s prediction the girl eloped with a boy about a month after my visit. Anushā was quick to remind me of her prediction and said, ‘didn’t I tell you she would elope?’.

This episode brought to light the way that violence erupts when a love relationship is uncovered. The girl’s resort to suicide is a common response when a love relationship is made public (Marecek, 1998, 2006; Marecek and Senadheera, 2012; Widger, 2015b). Anushā’s indication that the mother lied to me about the suicide attempt highlights that the family wants to keep the details a secret. However, the fact that Anushā knew of the details indicates the impossibility of keeping secrets in village life. Anushā’s judgement of the girl shows how the community labels girls who enter love relationships. Insultingly, they are referred to as ‘ripened girls’ or ‘mature women’ and predicted to elope. The incident showed that there is a link between girls, violence, love and elopement. In this chapter, I will explore why girls are insulted and inflicted with violence when they have love relationships, in a society that is increasingly forming marriages based on love rather than through marriages arranged by parents. I will first discuss the social expectations surrounding women’s relationships with men leading up to marriage. Then, I will discuss the changing forms of marriages in Sri Lanka elaborating on the contemporary perspectives of choosing a partner. Finally, I will explore how marriages unfolded in

Divulvæva giving prominence to elopement as a common way by which women become married. I will illustrate how elopement transgresses the social hierarchies that create idealised notions about women's roles before and after marriage. However, how women respond to the social backlash after a transgression gives a sense of their capacity to change their life situations within their subjugation.

### **Being a Good Girl**

I went to the canal with Shānti one day and met Anushā there doing her laundry. She was in her bathing sarong ready to take a bath. I found a place on the steps to sit and dangled my feet in the water while Shānti changed into her bathing sarong and joined Anushā to start doing her laundry. After complaining about the weather and mocking me for being too scared to bathe in the canal, the women spoke about a wedding ceremony that they recently attended. 'I saw them washing bed sheets in the canal even before the wedding; the boy was staying overnight at the girl's house. The mother has no shame above all!' pointed out Shānti. Anushā responded: 'and yet she let her get married on the marriage dais (*pōruva*) after all such behaviour in public. But, Somāvati *nandā's* daughter Sigiti she is a very good girl brought up with shame-fear. She still comes to the canal with the mother and the husband'. I asked them why it was wrong for that man and woman to bathe in the canal together. Shānti replied 'it was before marriage; is it right to bathe in public?' Anushā reinforced the point: 'good girls should not come to bathe in public with a man before marriage. It is not the right thing to do. People will say that she has no shame-fear'. I nodded indicating that I understood their sense of outrage and made a mental note that this was important.

The comparison of the two girls was made to highlight a difference in their expression of shame-fear (*lajja baya*). The notion of shame-fear is expected of men and women in Sinhala culture (Obeyesekere, 1984). The failure to exhibit shame-fear appropriately will lead a person to be blamed, humiliated and ridiculed by others (Obeyesekere, 1984). In this sense, shame-fear is a social control mechanism. However, it is clear from the literature that shame-fear is more often directed at the social control of women rather than men (de Alwis, 1997; Lynch, 1999b, 1999a; Hewamanne, 2003). In exemplifying this gendered aspect of social control, de Alwis expands shame-fear into the notion of respectability (*vadagathkama*). She argues that respectability was inculcated in women

through the colonial education system and later became identified as the Sinhala Buddhist expectation of all women's behaviour (de Alwis, 1997). Acts that indicate a woman to have no shame-fear (*lajja-baya na*) are directly linked with her sexual morality (Jaganathan, 2000). Therefore, a woman should act in the expected propriety of a 'good girl' in order to not be blamed or humiliated by the public.

The conversation at the canal suggested that the behaviour of men and women towards one another in public is an indicator of a woman's propriety. Washing bed sheets together led to the suspicion of a loss of virginity. It is this that Shānti and Anushā found unacceptable for a couple before marriage. The suggestion of pre-marital sex is a transgression of sexual morality that causes disrespectability (de Alwis, 1997; Lynch, 1999a; Hewamanne, 2003). The expected norm for young women is to be innocent virgins until they enter marriage (Hewamanne, 2003). Therefore, if a couple has a love relationship, are seen together in public before a wedding ceremony, or stay overnight at one house before marriage, suspicion of pre-marital sex arises. It is to prevent such suspicion that shame-fear is used so powerfully by a girl's family as well as the wider community. However, when transgressions take place, it is not just the girl who is blamed and shamed but her entire family. Mothers are especially blamed and shamed if their daughters transgress against propriety. As Trawick has argued, daughters are seen as continuations of their mothers which is why the community attach particular opprobrium to the mother in such instances (Trawick, 1992).

The construction of 'good girls' as naïve, innocent and ignorant of sexual relations begins from the moment a girl enters puberty. Winslow explains in detail the rituals that take place when a girl enters puberty and the religious significance given to the ritual (Winslow, 1980). The puberty rituals are a rite of passage for a girl as she is then thought of as a woman who is capable of being a mother. Nevertheless, instances of female sexuality such as menstruation, intercourse, and childbirth are considered to have polluting effects (Winslow, 1980). It is, for this reason, that girl children before menstruation and women after menopause are deemed to be pure and able to bestow blessings on others while women in between these two stages are considered to be polluted (Winslow, 1980). The stage of pollution in a woman's life is indicative of how a pervasive patriarchal culture imprisons women because their sexuality would impose a 'danger' to the accepted social order (de Munck 1998b;pg.295). Explaining male views of women in Laggala in central

Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere states that women are thought of as seductive because they are emotional and easily sexually excitable, inducing men into adultery and threatening family integrity (Obeyesekere, 1963a, p. 326). These factors have given the need for women to be controlled by men during the period that they are sexually active from puberty to menopause (de Munck, 1998). It is not only men but parents, siblings, relatives and the community that use shame-fear as a mechanism to control the woman preventing her in this period from doing anything indicative of her sexuality. In Divulvæva, the period after puberty until a woman enters marriage was commonly referred to as a 'bad age' (*naraka vayasa*) to indicate the risk of starting love relationships and elopement. The cultural expectation is that girls from puberty to marriage will behave in ways indicating shame-fear. The girl's family and the wider community instil shame-fear and control her behaviour during this 'bad age'. In this manner, women are subjugated in social hierarchies, which restricts the expression of their sexuality. However, this does not mean that women are victims in need of saving. In the following section, I will show how women navigate within this subjugation.

## **Dangerous Love**

Anushā told me that her neighbour's 16-year-old son had a love relationship with a girl from his tuition class. The boy had stolen money from his elder brother to buy a mobile phone for the girl. The couple had kept their relationship a secret and confined their meetings to weekly tuition classes. Their interaction was restricted to notes and gifts passed during the tuition classes and revolved mainly around conversations over the mobile phone. A secret phone conversation in the middle of the night when everyone in the house was assumed to be sleeping revealed the relationship to the girl's mother. The mother had hit the girl and confiscated the phone. When the father and the brother of the girl were informed of her relationship, they had gone to confront the boy's family. In a shouting match between the two families, they blamed each other for the apparent failings of their children. After this encounter, the young couple were scolded and warned not to continue their relationship. The consequences of their behaviour for them and their family was made clear. However, they ignored the warnings and continued the relationship. The violence against the couple increased. I was told that the girl's mother had hit her with a pair of scissors, scarring her face and missing her eye 'by inches' (*aḥa berunē annu namayen!*). The boy was beaten by the girl's elder brother on the road and was

badly bruised. By the time I left the village the hostility between the two families was deeply entrenched and a popular topic for village gossip. When I asked Anushā why it was necessary to be so violent, she said ‘it is a bad age; they do not know anything. If something happens, everyone will have to suffer. They should focus on their education’.

The popularity of mobile phones in Sri Lanka has created the opportunity for young couples to build relationships (Sirisena, 2018). The gifting of a mobile phone by a boy signifies male responsibility in a relationship and, as provider and protector, conveys the ‘seriousness’ he bestows on it (Sirisena, 2018). The mobile phone then becomes a way by which the couple conduct their relationship through ‘ring cuts’, ‘missed calls’, ‘good morning calls’, ‘lunchtime calls’, and ‘good night calls’ (Sirisena, 2018). The mobile phone companies utilise this market of young lovers by promoting phone call packages that cater to their needs and finances (Sirisena, 2018). It is a way of ‘being with’ each other in the absence of physical togetherness (Sirisena, 2018). For young couples, a mobile phone is also a method used against the social restrictions which disapprove of love relationships. The mobile phone provides a way to communicate secretly with one another, to get to know one another away from the gaze of the public. The knowledge of such mobile phone interactions leads parents to be suspicious of children and their devices. However, their introduction has opened up an avenue that allows young people to overcome the social restrictions that oppose love relationships.

Though both girls and boys are involved in love relationships, the tendency to blame and shame girls more than boys indicates a gender inequality. This reaction is tied to the understanding of love relationships as an indication of ‘no shame-fear’. The negation of shame-fear for a man is seen in his fearlessness (*baya na*) (Jaganathan, 2000). The use of labels such as ‘village thug’ (*chandiya*) to describe fearlessness in men can be construed negatively (Jaganathan, 2000). It can also be construed positively because it is an indicator of his masculinity (Jaganathan, 2000). Even a love relationship for a man can be linked with his fearlessness and is an indicator of his masculinity. This helps to explain why when a woman ends a love relationship, the man responds violently and may even attempt suicide (Widger, 2015b). Such gestures have been seen to represent the belief of Sinhala men in ‘one life-one love’ (Widger, 2015b). I would argue that it is also about protecting their masculinity from humiliation, which sometimes leads men to attempt suicide when a love relationship is ended by a woman. For a woman, on the other hand, having a love

relationship even in the most innocent form, devoid of any sexual relations, still runs the risk of a hostile reaction from parents and teachers, causing her dis-reputation (Widger, 2015b). As I have mentioned, she will be subjected to public insults that include terms such as ‘ripened girl’ or ‘mature woman’ to indicate her lack of sexual morality and shame-fear. Female attempts at suicide when a love relationship is uncovered are interpreted as a declaration of shame-fear; by attempting suicide, she is defending her status as a ‘good girl’ (Marecek, 1998, 2006; Marecek and Senadheera, 2012; Widger, 2015b). The different public reactions to ‘no shame-fear’ in men and women impacts on the response that occurs when a secret love relationship is discovered.

The link drawn between love relationship, sexual relations and elopement drives families to oppose love relationship in the ‘bad age’ violently. Widger claims that suffering is considered an essential aspect of love relationships that separates true love from a fickle love (Widger, 2015b). For lovers, the exposure to such violence is then an expectation that they confront by keeping a love relationship secret and non-public as much as possible. Sumudu who is a classmate of the girl in the couple Anushā mentioned explained the girl’s resilience to violence after the love relationship became known to everyone as ‘she showed us the scar on her face made by the scissors and laughed saying ‘whatever said and done *ammā* made the scar artistically (*monava natat ammā art ekata gahalā thiyanava*)’. In the village, past experiences of elopement make families more apprehensive towards love relationships.

The family dispute that erupted between the families of the girl and boy illustrate how they try to prevent the love relationship no matter what the cost. For families, the children’s behaviour is harming their honour (*nambuwa*) and status (*tatvaya*). However, the restrictions are imposed more on girl children as they are the ones who are at risk of losing their status as a ‘good girl’ if encountered with a love relationship. A boy may be shouted at and warned to stop the relationship, but a girl is likely to be restricted to the house, curtailing her freedom and mobility. The youth service officer in the village explained this to me: ‘it is very difficult to implement sports clubs in villages because parents are hesitant to send their daughters to be members. They fear that their interactions with boys will lead to love relationships’. The response by the families to a love relationship is dependent on the gender of the child, which again highlights the gender inequality and the subjugation of women in social hierarchies. However, the fact that women do get involved

in love relationships and pursue them amidst violence illustrates their capacity to operate within the subjugation.

There are means that help the girl to pursue love and challenge the subjugation. As I have already indicated one mode is the mobile phone. Anushā said, and Sumudu confirmed that every time the girl's mother confiscated her mobile phone, the boy would find a way to buy her a new phone. A basic mobile phone in the market costs no more than 2000 rupees (GBP 10) while 'phone SIM cards' are sometimes given free with the purchase of a mobile phone.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the mobile phone has enabled couples to pursue love relationships and challenge social hierarchies. For the more subjugated gender, the female, the mobile phone has given a space to express and experience what is normally socially restricted. Given these circumstances, it is no revelation that marriages in Sri Lanka are formed from love rather than arranged by parents. However, marriage itself is a process rather than an 'institution' one enters (Carsten, 2000). The various forms of marriage complicate the conceptual understanding of it. Next, I will explore the understanding of 'ideal type' marriages in Sinhala culture, which stand opposed to the more contemporary processes of marriage.

## **Marriage in Sinhala Culture**

The practice of marriage throughout Sinhala history has been recorded as fluid and flexible. Robert Knox, an employee of the East India Company who was held captive during the Kandyan kingdom from 1658 to 1678, reported that man and wife are together as long as they can please themselves (Knox, 2007). They had the possibility to part and engaged in other relationships. He also claims that sometimes women marry two husbands and men marry two wives (Knox, 2007). Polyandry and polygyny are recorded to have been in practice in order to keep property within families (Leach, 1961; Yalman, 1967; Tambiah, 2011). Leach states that marriage was based upon property holdings of the couple and what they would inherit (Leach, 1961). For instance, a man who has inherited property is likely to marry virilocally (*diga*) bringing a wife to his village. Conversely, if a man has no property to inherit, he is more likely to marry uxorilocally (*binna*) and move to live in his wife's village where he will look after her inherited property.

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<sup>7</sup> A SIM card, also known as a subscriber identity module, is a smart card that stores data for GSM cellular telephone subscribers.

The husband's status in such marriages is considered to be lower by the fact that he lives with his wife's family. Ranhami, a 67-year-old village elder I spoke with put it as follows: 'if a man married uxorilocally, he should have a torch and a palmyra leaf on the roof of his house at all times' (*binna kasade giyoth bulu aththai thal aththai vahale gabaganna one*). This means that the man may be asked to leave the house at any time of day and should have a torch ready to leave by night and a palmyra leaf to leave in the rain. Moreover, marriages were determined by interactions between men and women like moving together to a hut, the man eating cooked food that a woman has prepared, and a woman combing her hair in front of a man (Leach, 1961). Therefore, marriage in Sinhala culture was indicated by property inheritance and social interactions among men and women.

The flexibility to make a marriage and unmake a marriage changed with the induction of marriage laws under the British colonials. De Zoysa argues that the enactment of marriage laws by the British were based on values and concepts that had no social relevance (de Zoysa, 1995b). Polygamy and polygyny were made illegal, and monogamy was made the normative marriage arrangement. Marriage became a legalised institution with contractual obligations between spouses and their children. A couple's status as 'married' was largely acknowledged only with the registration of the marriage made evident by a marriage certificate. Living in one house, sharing food, and having sexual relations did not qualify as a marriage in the eyes of society (Leach, 1961). Such practices are condemned and said to be of 'no shame-fear'. Registering a marriage legally became essential and a marriage certificate a necessity to claim inheritance (de Zoysa, 1995b). De Zoysa further highlights that such changes to the practice of marriage 'operate against women as a group' because the inheritance of property was reliant on 'enduring monogamy founded on patrilineal descent and inheritance, whereby land and authority were concentrated on a single male patriarch' (de Zoysa, 1995b, p. 112). Though the changes to the legal face of marriage are argued to be mainly linked to inheritance, it has further implications for the social acceptance of marriage. The registration of the marriage is considered an important signifier of the social acceptance of the union that in turn provides the spouses and their children with rights to inherit property. As the legal marriage contract became an important signifier of the union and gave rights to the spouses and their children, the choice of a 'right spouse' became an essential aspect of the marriage process.



In traditional Sinhala marriages, the choice of spouse was an important consideration. Preferred marriages were ideally among those from the same sub-caste (*variga*) and between cross-cousins.<sup>8</sup> Researching in Therutanne - a village in the highlands of Sri Lanka, Yalman explains that in a cross-cousin marriage where the two families are already familiar, they do not have elaborate wedding ceremonies. The alliance is celebrated by the male cross-cousin (*ævæssā massinā*) presenting a cloth and a blouse to the female cross-cousin (*ævæssā naenā*). He then takes the woman away as his wife (Yalman, 1967). In such a marriage, the alliance between families is already explicit in their kin relations (MBS-FZD). Though the preference of cross-cousin marriages have changed, the importance of the cross-cousin relationship was explained to me by Ranhami at a funeral house. He explained to me that the funeral pyre has to be lit by a male cross-cousin of the deceased's daughter rather than the husband of the daughter (*bæna*). When I inquired why it was so, he explained to me that a son in law is not a relative. He was referring to the fact that there is no descent relationship with a son in law unlike with a male cross-cousin. A son in law is integrated into a family in legal and ceremonial forms but is still not considered to be of the same status as a male cross-cousin by descent.

Yalman explains at length the arrangement of a marriage between two unrelated families with an elaborate wedding ceremony to publicly announce the alliance (Yalman, 1967). He says: 'They do not always marry actual cross-cousins, but all marriages are treated *as if* they had taken place between cross-cousins' (Yalman, 1967, p. 151). What is noteworthy here is that the wedding ceremony makes a powerful statement which makes the couple *as if* cross-cousins. This induces a connection between the couple in the absence of a cross-cousin relationship. Gombrich and Obeyesekere argue that the need for wedding ceremonies developed with the rise of the middle class in Sri Lanka post-independence (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). They explain that the performance of a wedding ceremony was influenced by Victorian ideals and missionary schools under the British colonial regime (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). They liken the *pōruva* ceremony to the giving away of the virgin bride clad in white in a Christian church wedding (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). Figure six below is a photograph of a couple on a marriage dais (*pōruva*) where the rituals are performed.

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<sup>8</sup> The cross-cousin relationship is one between the children of opposing genders belonging to siblings of opposing genders. For instance, my mother's brother's son's and my father's sister's sons are marriageable to me.

Figure 6 A Couple Being Married on a *Pōruva*



The *pōruva*, on which a couple stand during the ceremony, is a flat board covered with a white cloth and adorned with rice. The bride stands on the left and the groom on the right to perform the necessary customs. The *pōruva* is associated with the fertility of the couple, and in some areas of Sri Lanka, it is made of a milk-oozing tree known as ‘jackwood’ (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). The couple’s thumbs or their little fingers are tied by the bride’s mother’s brother (*māmā*) to symbolise the union between the couple and the two families (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). The couple is then asked to remove the tied string from their fingers without undoing the knot that symbolises the union. The unravelling of the knot at this point would be a bad omen. The knot also has broader significance as a symbol of the union. For example, I was told that the knot is a reminder to the couple that they should solve their disputes without undoing the union. Another tying that happens in the *pōruva* is when the groom ties a necklace around the bride’s neck. This is referred to as the necklace tying (*māla bādima*) or shoulder tying (*kara bādima*) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). The symbolism of tying features prominently in the ceremony. It is of note that the Sinhala word for marriage is *kasāda badinava* and the word *bāndima* means tying and specifically the tying of two and more, that is, the couple and their families.

The wedding ceremony is followed by a second ceremony held by the groom's family called 'a home-coming ceremony' or an 'at home ceremony'. This ceremony indicates confirmation of the connection between the couple and the two families. A custom that takes place after the wedding ceremony and before the homecoming ceremony is the checking of the bride's virginity (*isadiya balanta yæma*).<sup>9</sup> The couple is expected to have sexual intercourse on the white cloth (*kirikadabelaya*) given to the bride at the *pōruwa* tied around her waist as illustrated in figure eight. Traditionally, a woman from the *dobbi* caste or senior women in the groom's family would check the cloth the next day expecting it to be stained by blood from the bride's hymen.<sup>10</sup> The stain of blood is a symbol of the bride's sexual morality and also linked with her family's honour and status. It is said that in tradition, if all is well the groom's mother will beat a drum (*rabāna*), and give the bride's brother red flowers wrapped in betel leaves, which he hands over to his mother who then beats the drum informing the village that all is well (De Silva, 2000). If proof of virginity lacks the drum will not be beaten, and white flowers would be sent to the bride's mother (De Silva, 2000). This custom though varying in practice is important for the arrangement of the homecoming ceremony. The arrangement of a homecoming ceremony is, therefore, a public proclamation of the bride's sexual morality. The groom and bride are then integrated into the kin network *as if* cross-cousins but not with the same status as actual cross-cousins. The ceremonial integration of persons into kin networks giving a kin-like status is embedded in symbolisms and rituals. Moreover, the ceremonies serve as social acceptance of marriage as it indicates the spouse is 'right' even though not a cross-cousin. However, the choosing of a spouse is multifaceted with different authorities, tensions and confrontations involved. In the following section, I will describe the different processes of marriage that have emerged based on how the spouse was chosen.

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that '*isadiya*' that literally means 'headwater' is also used to refer to the puberty ritual of bathing the girl after her first menstruation. It indicates that the sexual morality a girl is expected to preserve from puberty is checked after her wedding night. This kind of policing indicates the importance given to female sexual morality in Sinhala culture.

<sup>10</sup> The *dobbi* caste is the washer caste that engage in doing laundry for higher castes. Other than that, they also perform ritual duties that connect with the idea of pollution of female sexuality such as confirming of bride's virginity and bathing a girl at her puberty ceremony.

## **Choosing in Marriage: Contemporary Perspectives**

The choosing of a spouse has been discussed as a significant change in the process of marriage in South Asia (de Munck, 1996; Caldwell, 1999; Parry, 2001; Donner, 2002; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Abeyasekera, 2016). Caldwell has argued that the choice of a spouse in contemporary Sri Lanka takes two forms: 'love marriages' and 'arranged marriages' (Caldwell, 1999). For Caldwell, this choice is largely dependent on the socio-economic patterns of the country that he claims have changed since the 1940s giving rise to love marriages over arranged marriages (Caldwell, 1999). In an arranged marriage the parents would choose the spouse while in a love marriage the couple will choose each other (Caldwell, 1999). However, this dichotomised understanding of marriage as a linear social change from arranged to love overlooks the nature of 'love' in human relationships (de Munck, 1996). For instance, elders in a Muslim community on the east coast of the island instigate love between cross-cousins whose marriages will be arranged according to custom (de Munck, 1996). Drawing attention to 'background checks' and 'horoscope matching', Abeyasekera claims that urban middle-class women make an informed choice about a spouse because of the fear and anxiety of making a 'wrong' or unsuitable decision (Abeyasekera, 2016). Therefore, in either arranged or love marriages there is an aspect of love and influenced by both parents and children.

Moreover, though Caldwell argues for a shift in marriages from arranged to love, Knox's descriptions of marriage and Leach's findings in *Pul Eliya* indicate that similar patterns of marriage existed all along (Leach, 1961; Caldwell, 1999; Knox, 2007). Contemporary forms of marriage are, therefore, continuations of older forms of marriages with changes to conjugal expectations (Osella, 2012). The changes to conjugal expectations are described in referring to love marriages as 'companionate marriages' where couples choose one another for marriage with parental influence (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Abeyasekera, 2016). A partner is chosen with a sense of equality between the two in education, employment, social background and even in happiness (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Abeyasekera, 2016). The choice of a marriage partner is decided between parents and children as parents try to be accommodative of the children's happiness and children attempt to be happy with someone suitable in the eyes of their parents (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Abeyasekera, 2016). In such marriages, the parents and the children negotiate and share the responsibility of choosing a marriage partner.

Abeyasekera sees the choosing of a spouse as representing a woman's 'agency' though she also argues it to be a responsibility glossed with parental expectations (Abeyasekera, 2016). She states the norm in Sri Lanka is 'love' marriages that indicate for the young and the old of the urban middle class a step towards modernity (Abeyasekera, 2016, p. 2). Her interlocutors' understanding of arranged/love marriages as analogous to traditional/modern reproduces the dichotomous understanding of marriages in Sri Lanka (Abeyasekera, 2016). Furthermore, Abeyasekera overlooks the affective entanglements in the marriages of her interlocutors and asserts that the 'choosing' is separate from love (Abeyasekera, 2016, p. 7). She concludes by claiming 'self-choice rather than love captures what modern marriages signify to people' (Abeyasekera, 2016, p. 13). The variances of 'choosing' or 'making a choice' in marriage and the processual nature of human relationships are left unanswered in this account of marriages among urban middle-class women in Sri Lanka.

Focusing on this affective nature of choosing a partner, Sirisena, looking into relationships of university students in the University of Colombo explains how love relationships are formed with ideas of a good life and a certain future together in marriage (Sirisena, 2018). The good life and a certain future are informed by practices of sharing, trust, understanding and converting a stranger to someone of one's own (*magama kenek*) (Sirisena, 2018). The 'someone of one's own' is one with whom a future is planned and stability of a certain future is achieved (Sirisena, 2018). Finding someone of one's own is not chance or fate but hard work that entails effort and risk-taking (Sirisena, 2018). The painful consequences of unmet intensities of love and desire experienced in retrospect by men in Tamil Nadu exemplify the suffering when someone of one's own fails to become a spouse (Clark-Deces, 2014). As a result, drawing from his north Indian material, Parry claims that the acceptance by parents of marriage is secondary or even unnecessary because marriage is best understood as a 'bond between two intimate selves' (Parry, 2001, p. 816). By explaining the volatile nature of people coming together, separating, then coming together again, Parry explains the unpredictable nature of choosing a partner due to the involvement of desire and intimacy (Parry, 2001). Therefore, choosing a partner for love itself is an ambiguous task owing to the diverse affective natures of the choice.

In relation to marriages in Delhi, India, Mody explains this messy spectrum of choice by classifying marriage into three types (Mody, 2008). The confrontations of authority and negotiations between parents, children and the state in forming marriages exemplify the messiness of choice (Mody, 2008). The first is the arranged marriage when the parents choose and arrange a ceremonial as well as a legal marriage (Mody, 2008). Here the parents have more authority and influence to decide the marriage partner whereas the child may have very little. The involvement of the state is to legalise the marriage by registering the relationship. Second is the love cum arranged marriage where the couple negotiates their choice with their families and upon winning their approval arrange a wedding ceremony and a legal marriage together (Mody, 2008). In such instances, the authority is balanced giving a sense of a companionate marriage. The parents, the children and the state are in alliance with the arrangement of the marriage. The third is elopement, which Mody classifies as a love marriage where the couple would openly live in conjugality sometimes without a ceremonial or legal marriage (Mody, 2008). In this kind of marriage, the children have disregarded the parents and individually chosen each other as spouses giving rise to tensions and violence against them by the parents and the state (Mody, 2008). The varying levels of authority, negotiations and consequences in choosing a spouse gives significance to the problems involved in choosing.

The understanding of love marriage is then reduced to marriages that are thought unsuitable by the parents, and negotiation is considered impossible (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Mody, 2008). Choosing a person for love disregarding not only parental influence but also social expectations and acceptance is a distinctive choice in the spectrum of choice in marriage. This kind of love marriage is a transgression of the social hierarchy against the ideal type of marriage. The violence that Mody describes regarding couples who have eloped indicates the ways in which families and the state attempt to maintain the social hierarchy and appropriacy of marriage (Mody, 2008). Osella & Osella claims that a transgression of expected cultural hierarchies exemplifies the agency of the individual (Osella and Osella, 1998). However, the display of agency is controlled by violence as Mody has explained (Mody, 2008). Therefore, choosing a spouse transgressing social hierarchies, limits the agency and pulls the couple back into propriety. It is such a process of marriage that I found among the women in Divulvæva. They had chosen to transgress hierarchies by eloping with their lovers and entering marriage. In consequence, the women are challenged by society for entering marriage inauspiciously and without a

ceremonial integration into kin networks. However, the means they utilise to overcome the backlash from society illustrates the capacity of women even within subjugation.

### **Marriage in Divulvæva**

There were 264 married couples in Divulvæva living in 235 houses along eight roads. From them, 119 marriages claimed that the couple's parents arranged the marriage between them with a wedding ceremony and a registration of marriage. This type of marriage was explained to me as 'parents found and spoke to marry' (*ammalā boyalā katha karalā bandē*). The remaining 145 marriages claimed to have been love marriages, where the two partners chose each other based on love. Unfortunately, at that time I did not inquire whether they eloped or had a wedding ceremony but submitted to their expression of 'we got friendly and got married' (*api yaluvēlā bandē*) as love marriage. Later when I had built more familiarity with women in the village, I realised that some of those who had love marriages had entered marriage with parental consent similar to a love-cum-arranged marriage with a wedding ceremony and a registration of marriage (Mody, 2008). Others, similar to the love marriage Mody describes, eloped and later registered the marriage but have not had a wedding ceremony (Mody, 2008). Therefore, in Divulvæva there were different processes that led up to a marriage.

Couples who had 'arranged marriages' in Divulvæva were more likely to have had a smooth transition than those who had 'love marriages'. The unacceptability of love relationships leading to marriage led couples to be abused, harassed and humiliated by parents and relatives as I have described earlier in the chapter. The chaos generated had made the transition to marriage unpleasant. Parents had disowned children, and couples were insulted, shamed and subjected to village gossip. Some families after an initial period of chaos had accepted the couple and arranged a marriage ceremony for them. Other couples that were unable to find similar grounds with parents had resorted to elopement. However, it has to be highlighted that women who had eloped claimed that they informed their families soon after eloping to stop their worrying over their disappearance. Though their parents were hostile at the beginning, with time they had come to accept the marriage and incorporate the couple into the family. It is this type of marriage that I will describe in the latter part of the chapter. However, I am unable to substantiate this argument quantitatively as I did not inquire about the processes that led to marriage while doing the household survey.

Table six below illustrates the choice of marriage and residence after marriage for the 264 couples in Divulvæva. The residential patterns do not demonstrate the type of residence at a household level but at a village level. Fifty-one percent of couples have come to reside in the husband's village denoting similarities with patrilocal residential patterns experienced in the form of virilocal (*diga*) marriages. Twenty-six percent of couples live in the wife's village after marriage similar to residential patterns of an uxorilocal (*binna*) marriages. The data gathered cannot determine virilocal or uxorilocal residential patterns if both partners were from Divulvæva. Linking with the increase of nuclear-type households that I mentioned in the previous chapter, it can be said that the couples who married for love or by arrangement have a nuclear-type household rather than living with extended family. Thirteen percent of couples bought land and settled in Divulvæva after marriage.

*Table 6 Choice of Marriage & Place of Residence after Marriage*

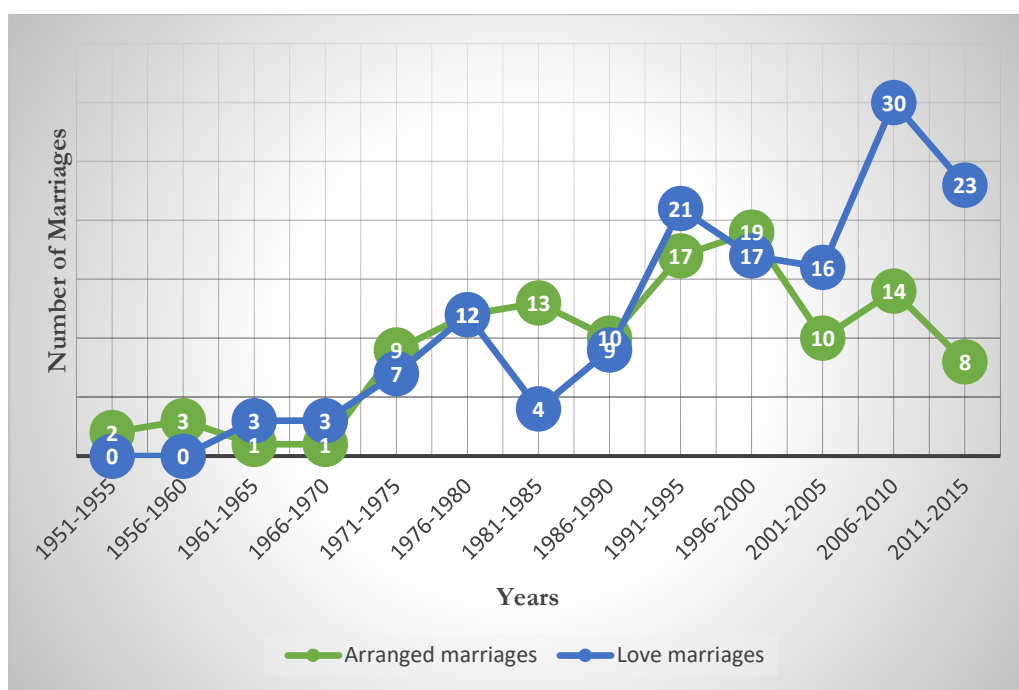
Choice of Marriage	Residence after Marriage	Number	Percentage
Arranged	Husband's village	72	27
	Wife's village	27	10
	Newly settled	9	3
	Both from Divulvæva	11	4
Love	Husband's village	64	24
	Wife's village	41	16
	Newly settled	12	5
	Both from Divulvæva	28	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>264</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure seven below illustrates arranged and love marriage trends in Divulvæva from the 1950s to 2015. This time span means that according to my household survey the oldest married couple in the village entered marriage in the 1950s and the youngest couple married in 2015. The smaller number of marriages in the early years compared to the latter years signifies that as a young village there are few elderly couples. Love marriages increased during the 1990s compared to arranged marriages. This trend is influenced by the fact that there are less living couples who entered marriage before the 1990s.



Therefore, what is significant is that both types of marriages are present in varying numbers throughout the time span. The variations between the two types of marriages are not contrastingly different in the previous years though there is an increase of love marriages in recent years beyond 2001. This means that love relationships converting to marriage is a common practice in the village. Therefore, it is safe to say that love marriage is not new in the village but has become popular in recent years.

*Figure 7 Trends of Arranged and Love Marriages in the Village*



When speaking with women in the village, I found women in older generations who had love relationships and entered marriage by elopement just as some younger women have. This indicated to me that elopement was a common event in the process of marriages in Divulvæva, practised throughout the time span. Therefore, I would not claim it to be a new trend in Sinhala villages but a trend that research on Sinhala marriage has not focused on or explored in detail. In the following section, I will describe Mihiri's elopement and entry into marriage. I will explain how elopement formulates and the consequences faced by a woman after entering marriage this way.

## Eloping in the Moonlight

During my first week in the village, I met Mihiri- a 23-year-old woman who had moved to Divulvæva three years ago after marriage. She had an outgoing personality which made it very easy for me to get to know her. Her husband Thushan was a soldier in the special task force in the Sri Lanka army. When I asked Mihiri how she got married to Thushan, she laughed and said, ‘we eloped in the moonlight’ (*api hañda pānē pānala giyā*). She said that it was a sudden decision they had to make because she received a call from her mother when she was out with him. She explained ‘I got terrified, *amma* sounded so angry, someone in the village had seen us walking in Anuradhapura town, I knew if I go home I will be beaten and scolded. I told Thushan that I couldn’t go back home, so he brought me here, to his home. My parents came to this house that night itself and asked me to come home with them, I looked at Thushan, and he looked sad and shook his head indicating me to stay, so I stayed. We registered our marriage about a week after that’.

Elopement resulting from family hostility against a love relationship was a common reason many women spoke of when explaining the process of their marriage. For instance, Lakshmi told me ‘the only time my father hit me was when he found out that I was having a relationship with Upul. Someone had seen me talking to Upul in town and told him. I couldn’t bear the problems in the house. Everyone was blaming me and was against our relationship. That is why we eloped’. Similarly, Shānti told me ‘my brother tried to break my hand when he once caught me writing a letter to Anura. We eloped because I couldn’t tolerate the problems in our house. It was like a battlefield’. The nature of the hostility from the families is best understood in Shānti’s comparison of the violence she faced in the house to a battlefield. In their violent attempt to preserve the girl’s propriety, the family gives her reason to elope. The girl, seeing her lover as ‘someone of her own’ gains confidence that a good life will be with him away from her violent family (Sirisena, 2018). The impossibility to negotiate with parents because of the preconceived notions about love relationships gives cause for lovers to elope in order to preserve their intimate bond.

The metaphor Mihiri used to explain how she married Thushan, ‘eloping in the moonlight’, denotes the public perception of elopement. The darkness of the night lit by the moon is illustrative of romantic love and hidden sexual relations that accompany popular imaginaries of elopement. After eloping, the suspicions of the families and the

wider community of sexual relations and a loss of virginity of the girl forces couples to enter marriage through legal registration even if the couple has not had sexual relations. Such public perception of elopement leaves no space for the ceremonial tying of two and more to take place. In the absence of a wedding ceremony, the elopement becomes the public proclamation of the connection between the couple and the two families. It is not a pleasant start of kinship because of the violence and unpleasant dealings between the two families. Therefore, unlike the social acceptance displayed in a ceremonial wedding where the spouse is proclaimed as 'right' and incorporated into the family, elopement declares a transgression and doubt of the suitability of the spouse. The woman, is declared to have 'no shame-fear' indicating a negation of sexual morality. The humiliation directed at her and her family is the main reason to legalise the marriage through registration with the hope of bringing some social acceptance.

Age is the main determinant in the general marriage law in Sri Lanka that proclaim whether someone can be married. Section 363 (e) of the Penal Code of Sri Lanka declares the age of consent for sexual relations to be 16 years of age for both men and women. Therefore, if the eloped couple is below the age of 16, they are liable to be prosecuted. In instances where the male is above the age of 16 and the female is below the age of consent the male is liable to be prosecuted for statutory rape. Under section 364 (2) (e) of the Penal Code, the age for marriage is set at 18 years for both men and women. Therefore, even if couples engage in sexual activities from the age of 16, they cannot enter into legal marriage until the age of 18. Eloped couples fall prey to both these laws and become liable to be prosecuted depending on the age they eloped. Some parents, aware of these legalities, do not involve the state when they suspect their children to have eloped. Children are able to avoid being reported missing to the police by informing their parents of their safety soon after eloping. If the couple were above the age of 18, they could register their marriage with a marriage registrar providing they have two people to witness their marriage.

After an eloped marriage, the couple would live with a friend or family sympathetic to them and mediate their way back to the parents seeking their forgiveness and acceptance. Thushan's family had accepted the marriage and let them stay in his family home. Thushan's mother had died some years ago. His father, elder brother, younger brother and his wife were inhabiting the house when Mihiri came to live there. She explained to

me that Thushan's bedroom became their bedroom in the house. Dīpāni, Thushan's younger brother's wife is around the same age as Mihiri. The two women became close friends very quickly; they had to share the household work as there were no other women in the house. Mihiri visited her parents about six months later seeking forgiveness and acceptance. Her mother had given her some gold jewellery that she had made for her signalling forgiveness. Mihiri explained that the relations between her family and the couple gradually became better. However, she said that she didn't feel welcome in Thushan's house or the village.

The transgression of propriety by Mihiri gave a reason for villagers to label her as a 'ripened girl' or a 'mature woman'. Nandāvati, the owner of my two rented rooms was quite displeased with me for associating with Mihiri; she asked me 'can't you see what a cunning mature woman (*kapati ammandi*) she is? I do not like you bringing her into this house'. Nandāvati forbade me to allow Mihiri to visit me in my two rented rooms. Such restrictions quite disheartened me. Mihiri to me had been very loyal and good. She even had a habit of bringing me food and taking me around to see the landscape of the area. I soon realised that many elderly women and men judged Mihiri badly because of her elopement. A village woman who thought Mihiri was helping me with my research said, 'she would not know much about the village, she came here after eloping with Thushan recently'. I realised that such comments were for me to understand that Mihiri has transgressed propriety and is not a good girl. Nandāvati's and the village woman's remarks were to prevent my association with Mihiri. This indicated their belief that relational flows between a good girl and a ripened girl can contaminate a good girl making her a ripened girl too. When I tried to explain to Mihiri that she should not visit me in my two rooms, she soon realised what had happened. She said, 'I felt that Nandāvati *nandā* would say something. She is very wicked (*napurui*)'.

The insults which allude to a girl being a 'mature woman' or 'ripened' remind the girl of her transgression. The Sinhala terms used such as '*niga karanava*', '*napurukam karanava*' are indicative of wickedness and are supposed to induce humiliation in the transgressor. For instance, Nandāvati's restrictions of my association with Mihiri was understood by Mihiri as Nandāvati's wickedness. In this sense, Nandāvati was able to humiliate Mihiri for her lost status in the public eye. However, for Nandāvati, she was not being wicked but protecting me from being contaminated. She claimed that I was her responsibility because

I was an unmarried woman who lived in her house. This kind of ‘wickedness’ towards women who have transgressed has similar implications to ‘scorn (*kbota*)’ described by Mookherjee regarding the rape victims of the Bangladesh liberation war (Mookherjee, 2006, 2015). Being common in the village, elopement is not considered a ‘public secret’ as rape is in Enayetpur, Bangladesh (Mookherjee, 2006, 2015). However, elopement indicating improper sexual activity between men and women is a transgression. For this reason, ‘wickedness’ is a form of scorn used to instigate shame in women who have eloped. In such instances, the woman is made an object of scorn.

In this sense, scorn has a social function similar to the negation of shame-fear, to blame and humiliate persons. The special effect of scorn is its ability to remind people of a past event that generates blame or humiliation (Mookherjee, 2015). For eloped women, it is the elopement that is reminded in order to humiliate them. The humiliation of rape victims in Enayetpur was extended to their husbands and children (Mookherjee, 2015). In Divulvæva it was the girl’s parents, especially the mother that was blamed most for her daughter’s transgressions. Information of the elopement is spread through gossip with details of the event making it public knowledge. The family is humiliated knowing that the elopement is public knowledge. It is this ‘knowing that others know of the transgression’ that gives a sense of loss of honour and status to a woman’s family. They have failed in their task to preserve female propriety by instilling shame-fear in their daughter. On the other hand, the man and his family are considered to be ‘good people’ who accepted a ‘ripened girl’ who otherwise would not have a certain future by marriage. The villagers would claim that the man’s family is virtuous to have accepted the connection (*badima*) made by elopement. However, it is not uncommon for a man’s family to reject the couple after the elopement. It is in such instances that the couple would have to seek refuge with another relative or a friend who is sympathetic to them. Then, with the help of the relative or friend, negotiate acceptance into either family.

Mihiri explained how it was not just other villagers that treated her badly but also her husband and his family. She said ‘I get scolded for not cooking, not sweeping the house, not washing clothes, it is like I am their servant. I have to do what everyone says. Today in the morning *loku aiyā* scolded saying that the food was horrible. Then *akkā* came in the evening and went around showing me how dirty the house is. It is all because I came here by eloping (*mē okkoma mama panalā āpu nisa nē*)’. Mihiri rationalised the wickedness of her

affines to be linked to her entry to the family by elopement. This indicates that the eloped woman's knowledge that she has transgressed propriety is recalled through exposure to scorn. Mihiri told me that even her husband Thushan whom she thought of as 'someone of her own' was also wicked to her (Sirisena, 2018). She said that once when they were having an argument, he said, 'don't I know of your character, you eloped with me' (*man danne nadda umbē bēti, māth ekka pānala āpu eki nē*). Direct comments like that from her husband reminded Mihiri that she had lost her status even within the marriage because of elopement. This was her 'beautiful mistake'. She once sent me a text message saying that the humiliation by villagers, her husband and his family made her feel 'helpless' (*asarana vela*) and very lonely (*tanikamak dānenava*).

Mihiri had to submit to the authority of Thushan's family sometimes against her will. For instance, Thushan's father had insisted that she give her gold jewellery to Thushan's elder brother to pawn for a financial emergency he had. Mihiri said 'I did not want to give my gold jewellery; it was what my parents gave me. But when *appachchi* insisted, I had no choice. I am worried if *loku aiyā* will pay the pawn dealer on time and get me my jewellery back. I will be very upset if I lose all my gold jewellery.' The jewellery had great sentimental value to Mihiri because it signalled forgiveness from her parents for eloping against their wishes. She said that Thushan does not care much about these issues but feels bothered by her when she complains to him. He was hardly at home because his job in the army only allowed him to come home once in three months for ten days. After explaining her helplessness in her husband's house, Mihiri said, 'it is the fire I gave my parents that have come back to me' (*mama ammalāta dunna gindara thamai dān mata paththu venne*). She was referring to the suffering she caused to her parents when she eloped with Thushan as 'fire'. She knows that their honour and status was harmed by her transgression. She rationalised her suffering in the house as caused by the pain she caused her parents. Her logic was similar to the Buddhist idea of karma, where if one causes suffering to others, similar suffering is said to come back to them in the present life or in a future birth. Such a pattern of thinking illustrates how women internalise the vilification that they receive and further makes them feel helpless in their situation after marriage. By doing so, the woman becomes an object of scorn to herself.

Mihiri's suffering escalated when she became suspicious of Thushan having extramarital relationships. Her main reason for suspicion was Thushan receiving many calls to his

mobile phone, which he answered when he was out of earshot from Mihiri or anyone else. She also said that he did not engage in intercourse with her when he visits home after three months. She said, 'if he does not need to be with me, then he surely must be having his needs met elsewhere? How would I know what he does in the camp?' She brought up her problem one afternoon when I was sitting in the garden with Dīpāni and two other women, Sēpali and Anjali, who live nearby. Mihiri said that her parents had asked her to leave Thushan and come back to live with them. Anjali said 'I think that is good *nangi*, you do not have children to hold onto this marriage. You can start over again'. Dīpāni said 'if you leave I will be alone in this house. So, I would not tell you to leave'. Mihiri smiled and said 'I do not want to leave. If I go back to my village, I will become known as a divorcee (*kasadē arila*). That would be worse than this'. I also felt that Mihiri was ashamed to go back to the house and village she left hoping for a good life and a certain future with Thushan. Returning to her parents would also confirm that they were right to be against her choice of marriage because it had proved to be unsuitable. Her comment also indicated how women are pressured to remain married to men for fear of humiliation. Instead, she tried to reclaim her propriety with practices of care as a good daughter in law.

### **Reclaiming Propriety**

Daughter in laws are expected to engage in practices of care, such as cooking, nursing, washing laundry, cleaning and other household chores for her affines (Lamb, 2000; Gamburd, 2013; Allendorf, 2017). In line with this expected propriety of a good daughter in law, Mihiri too engaged in practices of care in response to the 'wickedness' of her husband, his family and the villagers. Her strategy resembled the idea of compassion (*metta*) in Buddhist philosophy where people are advised to be compassionate to those who induce suffering in them. Within the house Mihiri attempted to make food from recipes she found in a popular tabloid called *kama*, meaning 'food'. The paper was popular among the women as it entailed recipes of tasty dishes. Mihiri complained that most recipes were expensive to cook, but she tried to cook affordable ones and took pleasure in getting her affines to taste it. Thushan's father's appreciation of such food was most sought after by her, possibly because he was the head of the household and hence had the most authority. Thushan's father gradually trusted her and even began to give her the household money to manage, which elevated her status in the house. Further, Mihiri with Dīpāni visited houses of close relatives of Thushan's family in the village for *Anurudu* with

a gift. Such strategic acts reinforced connections between their household and others. As a result of Mihiri's interaction with these households, they came to visit her too, and Mihiri got invited to come over to these houses to help to cook for events and socialise. In this manner, she developed a social network in the village that gave her a sense of belonging. The social ideal of a daughter in law was used by Mihiri to claim a 'tying' into her husband's family and the village. Her strategy gave evidence that the role of 'caregiver' entrusted to women can be used to regain lost status by transgressions to propriety.

Mihiri's next goal was to have her own house and a baby to secure the 'tying' into Thushan's family and the village. Her thinking was informed by comparing herself to Dīpāni who had a love cum arranged marriage to Thushan's younger brother. Thushan's younger brother was to inherit the family home, and therefore the house was technically Dīpāni's. She had given birth to a daughter who was about nine months old when I was doing fieldwork. By giving birth, Dīpāni has entered motherhood and given her affines continuity of their descent (*paramparava*). Living in a house that she can consider as hers and having a baby contributed to Dīpāni's status in the house. Mihiri helped Dīpāni to care for the baby and sometimes said to the baby, 'I am better than your mother right baby?'. Mihiri claimed that she could put the baby to sleep and make her stop crying better than Dīpāni. Thushan's father and siblings humiliated Mihiri saying 'What Mihiri does is act like a mother' (*Mihiri ithin ammā kenek vagē ragapāna ekane karannē*). Such comments by them indicated to Mihiri that she was 'fake' just as her entry to the house was by elopement - it was like a marriage but not a marriage because she did not have a wedding day or a wedding ceremony. Mihiri once showed me Dīpāni's wedding photographs enlarged and framed and kept in their living room for everyone to see and said 'look, she looks very pretty huh? I wish I had one. I will never have one now'. Hearing the sadness in Mihiri's voice, Dīpāni who was learning beauty culture and bridal dressing said, 'wait till I finish my course, I told you that I would dress you like a bride and take a photograph'. Mihiri's wish to have a wedding photograph indicated another way of regaining lost propriety by at least having a photograph dressed as a bride clad in white. I remembered seeing such photographs taken even after having children, in houses of other women who had eloped such as Shānti. In this manner, the woman is attempting to change the public knowledge of her as a 'ripened girl' or 'mature woman' to that of a 'good daughter in law', a 'good wife' and a 'good mother'.



One day when I visited Mihiri, she was glowing with joy. She took me by the hand and dragged me to her and Thushan's bedroom. Then she made me sit on the bed and said 'I have something to show you. *Appachchi* gave us the plot of land behind this house. We even got a plan drawn for the house'. She very happily showed me the architectural plan for her house and said 'we are collecting the material slowly to build the house. Once we half build the house we will move there, then Dīpānī will have to handle *loku aiya* and *akka's* problems. I will be in my house. I will also ask Thushan to take early retirement from the army and start cultivating or doing business. Then all my problems will be solved. We hope to start building in about six months'. For Mihiri having her own house meant that she would not be under authority or obligation to do as she is told by her affines. Moreover, building a house was a step to achieve the good life she envisioned with Thushan. She believed that the tensions she felt living with Thushan's family, and the suspicions she had of Thushan's extramarital relationships will all come to an end when they build a house for themselves and move out of the extended-type of household. A house just as much as a wedding photograph or a baby signified the tying into the husband's family after the transgression of elopement. It was also a public proclamation of a successful marriage that would help to change the perception of others towards her and gain social acceptance.

## Concluding Reflections

In terms of love and marriage, the chapter has illustrated how social hierarchies subjugate women and restrict the expression of their desires. The arrival of new technologies such as mobile phones has allowed women to experience intimacy as they go about choosing a possible spouse. I have illustrated how couples enter marriage in diverse ways based on how they choose one another and how the marriage is, then, publicly proclaimed and socially accepted. In these different ways of entering marriage, I have focused on marriages that transgress social hierarchies and which are deemed unsuitable and inauspicious by the wider community. However, such transgressions cannot be understood as instances that women challenged social hierarchies because the violence from their families as well as the wider community push them back into expected models of propriety. Yet, what is brought to significance is how women navigate *within* subjugation by complying with the given roles as caregivers. Women strategically use their practices of care to reclaim lost status and overcome her helpless situation. As a result,

she expects to win social acceptance for her marriage and secure a tying into her husband, his family and the village.

## Chapter 4

### More than Bricks and Cement: Building a House and a Good Family Life

When I first met Shanti, her house was a complete and substantial dwelling situated next to the village playground and facing the main tarred road (*tāra pāra*). There was also a shop space facing the main road which they rented out to businesses. As I learned their prosperity was not always like this. Shānti had eloped with her husband, Anura, who was a soldier in the Sri Lanka army. They had secretly married in the year 1992. She explained to me: ‘...so when Anura came back for holidays from the army camp, I went to my *akeka*’s house. He came there with a marriage registrar, and we got married. Then we stayed at our parents’ house for a while and then came to this house’. The house, in which Shanti lived at the time I interviewed her, was built on a part of Anura’s parents’ 0.5-acre homestead. His parents had legally owned the land until recently when they had divided it between Anura and his two brothers. Though the siblings had moved out of the main family house (*mul gedara*), they lived in separate nuclear-type households in the same homestead creating a compound that has long been a feature of Sinhala domestic life (Leach, 1961). Shānti explained to me what it was like setting up house in Anura’s parents’ homestead:

This house was half-built when we came. The four rooms in the front were built, and the roof was up. These walls in the middle were only half built. There were weeds on the ground. This kitchen door was fixed to our room. That was the only room that could be securely closed. Afterwards, I put *sittu* and built room by room.<sup>11</sup> The *sittuva* (singular of *sittu*) for those window grills was about 25 rupees per month those days. We somehow had a fairly built house by the time our son was born.

It was clear from Shānti’s account that life at the start of her marriage was challenging. Over the years the house was built up, and they have become more prosperous. During my fieldwork, a woman named Kumāri had an ‘eating shop’ (*kama kadayak*) in the rented shop space. Shānti was also renting a room in her house to a man named Sarath. The

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<sup>11</sup>A method of saving money mostly used among women. A group of women would decide on an amount of money that they would contribute to over a year. They would draw lots to determine the turn on which each member would obtain money.

space they had was well utilised to generate an income for the family. When I asked her about it, she said, ‘yes, with the expenses of two children we thought to generate an income by renting. This property and Anura’s salary were all we had. Since Anura was hardly home, renting also gave the children and me a sense of security. There were always people in the shop and in the house’. She looked down at her hands, sighed, and continued, ‘now, it doesn’t matter who is around. This house is built upon our *bādim* when one of us is no longer in this house; it becomes a ‘dead house’ (*mala gedarakē*). I couldn’t live in this house after Anura died. I felt suffocated when I’m in this house. Then, I run out of the house and cry loudly’. Shānti’s husband died shortly after he took his retirement pension from the army. As she explained:

He came home in February 2011. He started cultivating his part of his parent’s paddy field. One day he collapsed in the field. When taken to the hospital the doctors said that he had died from a heart attack. I was at home when his brother came to tell me the news. I don’t know what happened to me. I ran out to the main road hoping to be hit by a bus and die. But, the neighbours held me back.

She paused for a moment and looked away in an attempt to stop her tears. Then she continued,

We were very loving; we had a good family life, we were thinking to go on trips and live in peace when he took the pension. All that lasted only for nine months. I cannot make up my heart however much I try. This is such a fire for us! (*Mama kochcara bāluwath bitha badā ganna bā. mēka apita mahā gindarak!*).

Shānti’s narration of how her house was built closely paralleled the story of her life after marriage to Anura. It was significant that she now referred to her house (*gedara*) as a ‘dead house’ (*mala gedara*). This is illustrative of how the process of building a house and that of making a marriage are actually ‘two sides of a single phenomenon’ (Carsten, 2004, p. 43). In this chapter, I will explore women’s narratives about building houses and making long-term domestic and intimate relations. The processual building of a house and a marriage indicates the nature of the family life in the house. The villagers declare a house as a ‘good

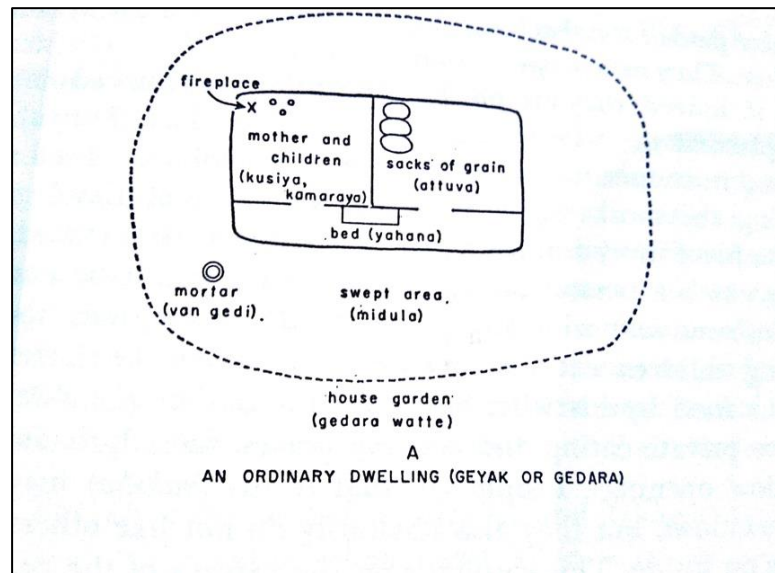
house' (*hoda geyak*) or a 'problem house' (*prashna tiyana geyak*) based on the family life. The judgement is arrived at by contrasting with the socially expected 'good family life' (*hoda pavul jivitayak*). The woman of a house is responsible for maintaining the public image of the house as it is a space where she as a caregiver is dominant. I will explain how women engage with this responsibility by changing the structure of the house and exercising tolerance (*ivasima*). Therefore, I will argue that a social hierarchy of houses emerge based on the nature of family life in the house, which the woman with her everyday practices of care is responsible for maintaining. Before, engaging with the ethnography, I will first discuss the understanding of the house in Sinhala society and contemporary perspectives of houses, which I will use to explore the continuity between people and houses in Divulvæva.

## **A Gedara**

In Sinhalese, the house is called a *gedara*. It has multiple meanings which each have relevance to the argument that I wish to develop in this chapter about the relationship between married life and the house. The term means the dwelling place of patrilineal kinsmen who have a mutual interest in the family estate (Tambiah, 1958). These kinsmen may not be living in the same house but in different houses that are closely located on the same land (Tambiah, 1958). The group of kin residing on the same property are usually siblings linked to one *gedara* (Tambiah, 1958). The ancestral house (*mul gedara*) of a group of kinsmen usually appears in the men's names and signals their right to family property (Tambiah, 1958). Marriages were formed between cross-cousins inheriting the land of a *gedara* in *diga* or *binna* forms as discussed earlier in chapter three (Tambiah, 1958). Tambiah concludes that *gedara* is a grouping based on land tenure rather than kinship (Tambiah, 1958, p. 44). Reversing Tambiah's argument Leach claims that to build a *gedara*, inherit land and share water from the village tank the person has to have rights as kin (Leach, 1961). In Pul Eliya, the term 'compound' is used by Leach to describe a space with several houses whose inhabitants relate to one another as kin. This is said to be a prototype of a *gedara* (Leach, 1961). The kin rights are expressed by the villagers in Pul Eliya with the use of the word *pavula* which translates to family in English (Leach, 1961). A *pavula* consisting of the children of one woman is considered the 'ideal' family. A group of kinsmen who cooperate for a purpose such as at ceremonies, funerals, or in cultivation are considered an 'effective family' (Leach, 1961). Marrying in *diga* or *binna* to the 'ideal' or the 'effective'

family will enable a person to obtain kin rights to a *gedara* or a compound (Leach, 1961). For Tambiah and Leach, the *gedara* is an analytical unit to understand rules of kinship within a social group that shares rights to a house and its land. However, it is significant that the woman's perspective of the house is absent in this discussion.

Figure 8 Yalman's Floor Plan of an Ordinary Dwelling in Terutenne



Yalman, on the other hand, takes the understanding of the *gedara* further by analysing the physical structure of the house to explain the formation of nuclear families after marriage. In Terutenne, Yalman explains how the house as a commensal unit is identified by its more informal reference as *ge* (Yalman, 1967). A *ge* is formed through marriage for a newly married couple by constructing a hut adjoining a larger dwelling, that is, a *gedara* (Yalman, 1967). The couple will start living in this constructed *ge* by building a hearth with a few stones and cooking and sharing food (Yalman, 1967). A separate granary and a cooking place are kept private to demarcate a *ge* from another *ge* within a *gedara* (Yalman, 1967). The architecture of the *gedara* is determined by the wealth of the *ge* as more rooms in a house means more wealth (Yalman, 1967). An ordinary family's *gedara* as drawn by Yalman is illustrated in figure eight above. The diagram shows that it consisted of two rooms and a veranda. One room is for cooking, referred to as *kusiya*, is also the room the wife and the children would sleep in (Yalman, 1967). The other room is for storing sacks of grain and maybe the sleeping place for the man (Yalman, 1967). The husband may also sleep on the veranda where he may have a bed or a mat laid out for him (Yalman, 1967). Though the couple does not sleep together, they will visit each other in a room or

go together to the *chena* for sexual relations (Yalman, 1967). In such nuclear-type households, the woman cooks for others in her house and cares for and maintains the house. The man is a provider of food, clothing, construction and repair of the house (Yalman, 1967). In his discussion of the house, Yalman hints at the continuity between people and structures upon which house relationships are constituted. He brings the woman into the picture by explaining her responsibilities as the caregiver in the house.

These descriptions of the house can be understood in terms of Levi-Strauss's theorising about the house and house societies (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie, 2000a, 2000b). As a concept, a house is typically seen as a social group that has a connection to property in both its immovable and movable forms (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie, 2000a, 2000b). The ownership of property constitutes a hierarchy within society giving varying statuses to houses (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie, 2000a, 2000b). The relationships between houses are determined by the relative position in this hierarchy (Gillespie, 2000a). Marriage is the form by which houses create alliances. These alliances might give rise to tensions and conflict or strengthen loyalties between social groups (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie, 2000a). However, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones argue, understanding houses in the language of kinship and affinity limits our interpretation as it does not account for the process of living in and being of the house (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 37). 'A house is a place in which the to and fro of life unfolds, builds, modified, moved or abandoned in accord with the changing circumstances of their inhabitants' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 1). Taking this view forward, I would illustrate how living in a house taken from a woman's perspective, contributes to our understanding of the house.

In Divulvæva, houses demonstrate this 'unfolding' in various ways. For example, when a girl child of the house attains puberty, the house becomes a 'puberty house' (*kotahalu gedara*). Similarly, when a young person in the house is getting married, it becomes a 'wedding house' (*magul gedara*). When there are religious ceremonies in the house, the house becomes pious and might be called as 'almsgiving house' (*dane gedara*) or 'sermon house' (*bana gedara*). Moreover, a house becomes a 'dead house' (*mala gedara*) when a person who lived in the house dies. For this reason, the house is more than bricks and cement. It is a 'metaphor' for the family within the house (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). The objects inside the house serve as a 'mnemonic for the embodied person' whose

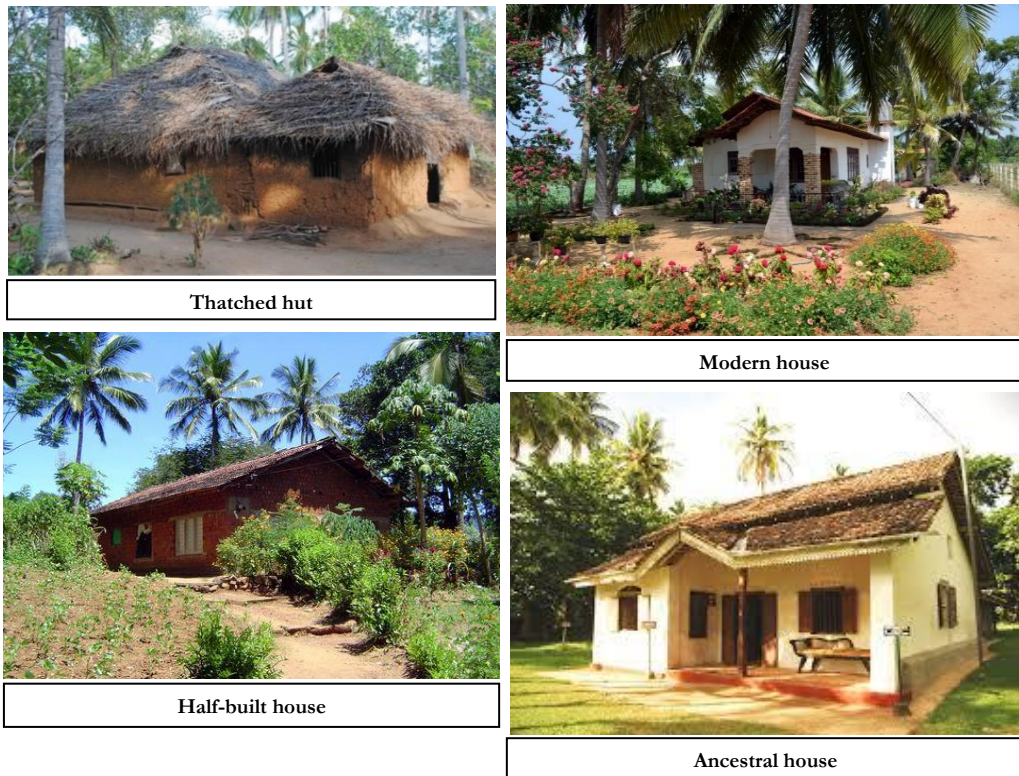
memories are contained within the house (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 2). The house then links space and time through the history of its structure, experiences of generations within the house, and heirlooms (Gillespie, 2000a). For these reasons, the house is aptly described as ‘an extra layer of skin’ or a ‘second layer of clothes’ that would reveal and display as well as hide and protect (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 2). I will elaborate how this kind of ‘unfolding’ that happens in a house is influenced by the woman and is thought of as part of her responsibility as a caregiver. Before engaging with the woman’s narrative of houses, I will first give an account of how houses in Divulvæva appear in structure.

### **Houses in Divulvæva**

In Divulvæva houses were of different types. Some were ancestral homes that had been there for a long time. Others were modern houses in varying states of completion. The village had no more than one or two thatched houses. The villagers spoke of thatched houses with much fondness as they said that it suited the dry zone climate best. They said that the mud walls made the house cool when the weather was unbearably warm. However, they aspired to build modern houses with asbestos or clay tiled roofs, tiled marble floors, ceilings, inside toilets and pantries. Those who had such completed modern houses in the village were considered to be of wealth. Some such houses even had parapet walls or fences with gates bordering their land. Most houses in the village were half-built houses inhabited by young couples and their children. The floor plans of their half-built houses suggested modern houses in the making. As with Shānti and Anura’s house described at the beginning of this chapter, most of these houses were built on the part of the 0.5-acre homestead shared with parents and siblings. Then, there were ancestral houses inherited by children or grandchildren of early settlers in the village. Some ancestral houses have been renovated by the inheritors to look more like a modern house by including tiled floors instead of cement floors and installing pantry cupboards to the kitchen. Other ancestral houses were not well maintained and had paint fading, broken roof tiles, broken floors, and windows and doors that wouldn’t shut properly. Figure nine below illustrates these different types of houses in Divulvæva.



*Figure 9 Different Types of Houses in Divulvæva*



The visible state of a house reflected the status or wealth of the family living in it. It should also be noted that in line with the village being a ‘young’ village as illustrated in chapter two, most houses of any type were inhabited by nuclear-type families. A half-built house or an unmaintained ancestral house suggested that the family living there had problems with their income. As one farmer said, ‘we build our house in the same way as a wasp builds its, little by little’. Those who engage in farming earn a considerable amount after harvesting their *maha* season crop. It is only during that time that they will try to build a bit of their house. The family with the help of their neighbours and maybe one or two masons who may have considerable knowledge of architecture would build the house according to what the family can afford. Most men in the village take pride in being able to build their own house as they are usually very good with mason work and have the skill to build. A villager put the process of building a house in context saying ‘ultimately we never get to live in a completed house, my goal is to have a completed house at least to keep my dead body. And at least my children will have a good house to live in’.

Increasing landlessness and the competing aspirations of marketisation have created even more pressure for villagers to build modern houses. However, this goal progresses very

slowly because the villager's income is uncertain and unstable. Floods or drought may result in too much water or not enough water for cultivation; this can impact the household economy harshly. In such instances, villagers attempt to work as labourers or generate income by picking and selling fruit that is in season. The meagre income produced in this way is hardly enough to make ends meet in the household. Those who have employment in government or private sector have better chances to complete their houses as they can apply for housing loans. The farmers too have the option of getting loans from microfinance companies for very high-interest rates. For farmers or wage employees, taking loans makes them fall into debt that then affects their lives for a long period of time. In most households, both man and woman will try to earn and contribute to the house economy. The women would either utilise the home space as Shānti had by renting, or sell cooked food, weave baskets and mats, sew clothes, and work as agricultural labourers to generate an income. The villagers had responded to the character of their economy by having multiple ways to generate an income in the house.

Though the state of the house says something about the wealth of its inhabitants, it does not coincide with the status given to the house in the village. The families that could trace their ancestry in the village had higher status than the newly settled families whose wealth lay in businesses. In addition, employment in the government sector or private sector also influenced the status of the house. Houses, where men or women had served in the armed forces for instance, had a higher status in the village. I was told that the Abeyratne family in the village were held in high regard because all six children in the family, both men and women, worked in the armed forces. Also, the level of education in the house was a feature to consider. The houses where teachers lived or where a child had entered university were spoken of in high regard. In addition, houses that had alliances with local politicians were considered of higher status, such as the houses of the organisers for the popular political parties. Even when selecting individuals to take leadership in the village, for instance, appointing the president of the Death Donation Society or finding someone to address a public gathering in a ceremony, these varying statuses were considered by the villagers. Therefore, the status of a house was decided upon by a combination of wealth, ancestry, employment, education, and political patronage of its occupants. Though a social hierarchy of houses seems to emerge related to the said factors, a closer investigation of how the house is spoken of by women led me to see how the nature of family life itself contributes to the public image of the house.

## A Good House

Bloch discussing the Zafimaniry of Madagascar shows how young couples after marriage first reside in a ‘flimsy and fragile new house’ and begin their life together by lighting the hearth which is a metaphor for sex (Carsten, 2004; Bloch, 2018). Then after the birth of children, the house is rebuilt to a more permanent structure expressing the good marriage symbolised with fertility (Carsten, 2004; Bloch, 2018). Moreover, Janowski explaining of the extended-type of households of the Kelabit people in East Malaysia states that the focal conjugal couple who provide food for the commensal unit is the core of a house (Janowski, 1995). The focal conjugal couple will engage in cultivation together and spend more time together inside the house whereas younger couples spend less time together outside an inside of a house (Janowski, 1995). Carsten explaining of houses in Langkawi, Malaysia explains how newly married couples avoid eating together because eating is associated with sex and is liable to be teased by others (Carsten, 1995). Once the couple has children, they will form a household and will be seen eating together symbolising their commensality (Carsten, 1995). These examples illustrate that a conjugal relationship grows with time, in prestige as well as intimacy as they accumulate responsibility and their own young to provide for in parallel to building a house.

A similar processual and temporal development of marriage is symbolised in the houses of nuclear-type families in Divulvæva. For people in Divulvæva, the house is a step in a successful marriage that then shows the gradual growth of the couple as they complete their house, have children, generate a stable income and live harmoniously. These factors are together viewed as features of a ‘good family life’ (*boda pavul jivitayak*) that is indicated to the public by way of the house. Shānti’s narrative, with which I began this chapter, is an excellent example of the link between marriage and building a house. Anushā explained of Shānti’s house as ‘That family was good. Anura *aiyā* was a very good man. It was such a shame that he died like that. Shānti *akka* still suffer because they had a good family life’ (*e pavula hari bodata hitiyā. Anura aiyā harima boda manussayek. Eya maruna eka hari aparādayak. Eyalata boda pavul jivithayak tibuna nisa Shānti akka tāma vidavanava*). Her statement indicated that the death of Anura had made the family ‘not good’. Here the meaning is not in a moral sense but in the understanding of what constitutes a family. The death of a spouse means that the family is incomplete. This is why Shānti’s house is now a dead house.

Other women in the village too had the same perception about Shānti's house and lamented the loss of Anura and the incompleteness of their family. Their house was a completed modern house; they had two children, a stable income, and harmonious relations inside and outside of the house. Therefore, Shānti's house symbolised a 'good family life' to the villagers.

Shānti's own expression of their family life was in the memory of Anura. She explained her love for Anura with practices of care and sexual relations:

I always got the best of everything for him. I went shopping for his clothes, and I bought the best for him. Some women speak about not letting the man be [intimate] with her as if it is a big thing. I never said no, how can I? He is my man he married me for it. I have to give room for his need. He used to call me 'little mother' (*chooty amma*). Probably because I took care of him, we were so happy.

For a woman, it is an expression of love to have sexual relations with her husband. She understands it as a male need that she is fulfilling. Marriage is the socially accepted form in which sexual relations between a man and a woman can take place. Shānti then explained to me how she felt loved by Anura.

[He was] very loving, he never hurt me even with a word. He was so happy to retire from the army and come home. I also thought I would have some freedom when he comes home. I was doing all the work in the house and the work of the children. When he is home, he had a habit to come into the kitchen to talk with me while I cook. He helps me to cook too. Once he was saying that he would take me abroad if he wins a lottery. When he comes for holidays, we go to the canal to bathe together. You know I go to the canal to bathe every day.

Love of a man is understood by the woman in relation to non-violence. Anura 'not hurting even by a word' indicates that he didn't even verbally abuse Shānti. Their intimacy is expressed with 'acts of love' like talking, cooking, bathing in the canal and going on trips

(Trawick, 1992). Shānti explained how close the children and parents were by remembering Anura and their daughter's relationship. She said,

He was very close to our daughter. They go here and there together on the motorbike all the time when he came for holidays. She used to get very sad when he leaves for work after holidays. She would worship him and go into the room and cry.

These instances indicated harmony in the house that made everyone in the house happy together. For Shānti she found Anura to be, in Clark-Deces's terms, the 'right spouse' (Clark-Deces, 2014). She explained this to me as follows: 'I also felt that he was mine and he used to say I was his. I felt I was going to lose him, I felt it. We were so connected (*api atara badimak tibuna*)'. Therefore, the expression of love between the couple and close relationships between children and parents constitutes a 'good family life' in the house.

For Shānti her 'dead house' embodies the memory of her 'good family life' with Anura. She had large framed photographs of him in his army uniform in their living room. A framed picture taken at a studio with a blue background where she and Anura are standing close in bridal attire caught my eye. They looked happy in the photograph, Shānti seeing me staring at her wedding photograph said 'we took that even after our daughter was born. He said we should have a photograph at least'. I told her 'you look very pretty in it'. She laughed and said. 'A salon in town dressed me. We rented the attire. I was happy. He was with me'. The house itself like her wedding photograph preserved the memory of her good life with Anura. It is this memory that makes her cry and suffer living in the house. Shānti said, 'still when I see someone getting down from the bus and coming this way I hope it is him. I see him in my dreams especially on days when I am very sad. When I go to bathe in the canal, I remember him. He used to come with me before'. Her everyday life that was interwoven with his life had left a lot of memories for her. In consequence, the house has become a mnemonic for her, serving as a reminder of Anura.

Shānti explained the extent of her sorrow as 'I could live without my parents when they died but the connection to this outside man (*pita miniha*) I could not bear. Then our daughter became a big girl. I had to do everything alone. That loneliness, that heartache is what I cannot endure'. A husband is unrelated and unknown compared to the long

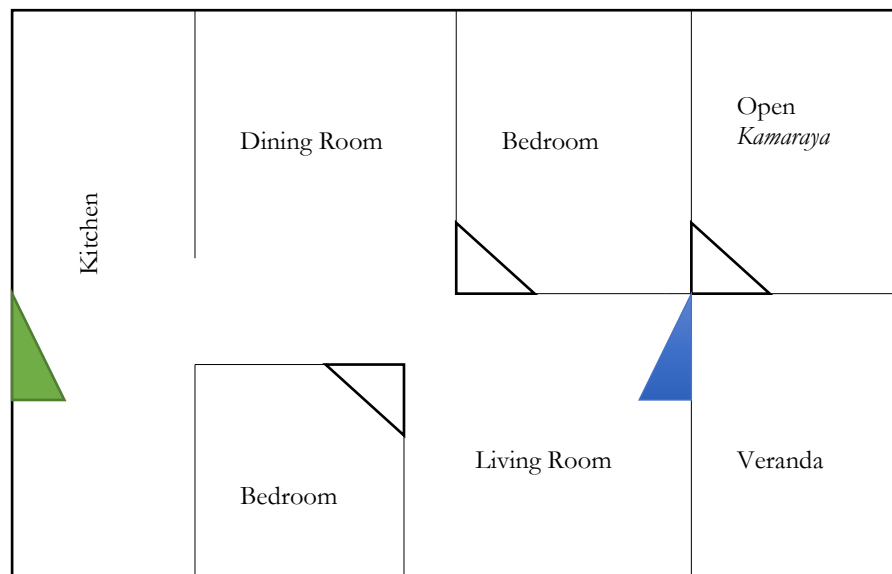
relationship with parents. However, in this case, the loss of a husband is more painful than the death of a parent because of the temporal and processual development of intimacy that is signified with building a house and a family life. For a stranger, Shānti's 'dead house' hides this memory like 'an extra layer of skin' or a 'second layer of clothes', but for those who live in the house, the memory of Anura's passing is frequently recalled (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). The house in this manner preserves and protects the memory of human relations through time from generation to generation (Gillespie, 2000a). Even for the villagers outside the house who knew the building from its inception, the time after Shānti's and Anura's marriage reminds them of the 'good family life' that existed in the house. Therefore, the processual development of the house and family life reflects the development of *badima* in the house. At the beginning of this chapter, Shānti explained this concept as 'what the house is made of'.

Other than intimate relations within the house, a stable household economy also contributes towards a 'good family life'. Shānti explained that it was her skill in managing the household economy that helped them complete the house and have a 'good family life'. She said to me, 'we lived well together because I managed everything well. He (Anura) could not manage things; it was tough for him'. The failure of a man to earn and provide for the family and a woman's failure to manage the income can rupture a 'good family life'. Women as managers of the home economy find ways to enhance the income amidst the uncertain economies that I explained earlier. In Shānti's case, she managed the money that Anura earned to complete their house as well as to increase their income by giving a room for rent in their house and the shop space. Even after Anura's death, Shānti is able to have an income from rent and Anura's pension. This kind of amplification of money is considered to be an excellent skill of a woman. By having an extra form of income the women can manage the home economy even if the main income generated by the man is impacted in some way.

The floor plan to Shānti's house is given in figure 10 below. The blue triangle represents the main entrance to the house while the green triangle represents the back entrance of the house. The room separate from the main house with a separate entrance is called the open *kāmaraya* (open room). It is this room that Shānti rented for an extra income. She said to me that those whom she rented the room to were very close to her family and became family-like (*pavule vage*). She said that Sarath, the man she was renting the room to

during my fieldwork, was ‘like a son’ to her (*puthek vage*). She explained to me that she cooks for Sarath and even washes his clothes at times. I saw Sarath riding around on Shānti’s scooter doing errands. He also goes to pick up Shānti’s daughter from tuition classes at night. Such events lead the villagers to gossip about Shānti saying that she is having an affair with Sarath. However, Shānti did not seem to care about the rumours; she told me ‘I do not care what anyone says, having Sarath in our *gedara* is good security for my daughter and me. (Her son works in Trincomalee and only comes home for a few days when he has holidays)<sup>12</sup>. We live in the same *gedara*, so I have to see if he has had food or not. He is like a son to me (*puthek vage mata*)’. The indication of Sarath being ‘like a son’ regulated their interaction, obligations and expectations of one another within the house. However, the difference between the family and the family-like relationship is symbolised by the open *kāmaraya* being separate from the main house and having its own entrance. The house in this sense is not only a symbol of kinship but also of other kinds of relationships.

Figure 10 Floor Plan of Shānti's Gedara



The intimacies between the conjugal couple are central to having a ‘good family life’. As indicated by Shānti, the woman maintains a ‘good family life’ with everyday practices of care. Managing and amplifying the wealth in the house is also a feature of ‘good family life’ as it allows the couple to complete their house and generate enough income to make

<sup>12</sup> Trincomalee is a town in the East coast of Sri Lanka, about 130km from the village.

ends meet in the house. It should be noted that a 'good family life' is not one without disputes, but as indicated by Shānti it should be non-violent. However, the responsibility entrusted to women is no easy task. Next, I turn to illustrate how a house is spoken of when a 'good family life' is ruptured.

## **A Problem House**

The houses that didn't comply with the expected image of a 'good family life' were called 'problem houses' (*prashna thiyana geval*). In such houses either the husband was an unemployed drunkard, the couple had no children indicating fertility issues, the man or the woman was having extramarital relationships, someone in the house had attempted suicide, or a teenage girl child had eloped and become pregnant. For instance, Anjali's and Nissanka's house was a popular 'problem house' in the village. They had eloped and entered marriage. I didn't get the opportunity to speak with Anjali in person about her 'problem house' but got to know about it from others in the village. Anushā was the most informative as she lived next door to Anjali and Nissanka. Anushā said that Anjali and Nissanka moved to their half-built house because Anjali was in dispute with Somāvati-Nissanka's mother. Anushā explained to me, "Anjali once stormed out of the house brushing her teeth and in her nightdress shouting at Somāvati *akka* saying 'if you are going to cook breakfast for him there is no point in me, his woman being here. I'll go home so you can cook and do everything for him'". Extended-type households restricted sharing, caring and loving that contribute to the growth of the intimacy in the conjugal relationship. Due to tensions created by restrictions to the growth of their intimacy, the younger couples do not live under focal conjugal couples like in Kelabit's extended-type houses (Janowski, 1995). The couples are pushed to move to a separate nuclear-type house. In Anjali's case, she had even attempted suicide as a result of her disputes with Somāvati. After that Nissanka's parents had decided to give part of their 0.5-acre homestead and some money to the couple to build a separate house. They did this in the hope that problems would end with the creation of an independent, nuclear-type household.

Anushā told me the reasons why Anjali and Nissanka's house is labelled by the public as a 'problem house':



Nissanka doesn't do any work. He stays inside the house all day then goes drinking with friends in the evening. Anjali wanted to go to work at a garment factory, but Nissanka fought with Anjali and did not let her go. When he starts hitting her, we have to go to save her. But that Nissanka is not easy to handle. He is such a bad man, he comes and watches when I bathe at our well too.

According to Anushā, Nissanka was not doing his duties as a husband by providing for his family. As a result, the house was having income problems. Moreover, he was not letting Anjali take on the role of providing. The income issues led to tensions in the house, which eventually caused violence to erupt. Nissanka was hurting Anjali physically, mentally and emotionally. For this reason, their family life just like their house remained half-built. Moving to a separate nuclear-type house had not enabled the couple to develop intimacy and develop a 'good family life'. The public knowledge of their problems led to it being labelled a 'problem house' indicating that family life was not conforming to social expectations.

The plight that Anjali was facing was rationalised in Buddhist karmic terms by Anushā in the following terms:

Poor Anjali, but in a way, it's her karma. She was first friendly with Rangana, Nissanka's friend. The woman somehow eloped with Nissanka leaving Rangana because she thought Nissanka's family was wealthier. Rangana suffered a lot because of what she did. But, now look what happened. Rangana has a good job in the phosphate factory, and Nissanka is a completely useless fellow.

Anjali's karma was believed to be the cause of her wrong choice of spouse. In this sense, the root cause in 'problem houses' is said to be a wrong conjugal relationship or choosing a wrong spouse. The process of choosing a right lover can be proven wrong when the lover becomes a spouse. The expectations of a man to provide and protect and a woman to care and nurture is an expectation that should continue beyond being a lover and into being a spouse (Sirisena, 2018). The failure of such expectations from a lover could result in a discontinuation of the relationship. After marriage, the consequences are further

complicated. The social expectations attached to marriage and the need to maintain a public image cause couples to retain the marriage even amidst violence. However, in such situations what becomes apparent is that the problems are rationalised as the woman's failure to choose a 'right' spouse or to transform the spouse into a better man.

The blame for the wrong choice is directed at the woman rather than both the woman and the man. Similarly, women are targeted for public blame when houses become 'problem houses'. For instance:

- if the man is an unemployed drunkard it is the woman's inability to control and change the man;
- if a couple has no children the villagers would say that the woman is barren (*vada*);
- if the man is committing adultery it is because the woman is not fulfilling his sexual needs;
- if the woman is committing adultery she is of no sexual morality;
- if there is self-harm or attempted suicide in the house, the woman has been bickering about problems shaming the inhabitant of her house;
- if a teenage girl child elopes and falls pregnant, it is the mother's fault for not instilling shame-fear in her; and
- premature death of a husband or a child in the house is the demerit (*pavak*) of the woman.

Directing blame towards women in this way indicates that they are more responsible than the man is for making a house a 'good house'. The woman's role in the house as caregiver entails the responsibility to maintain the public image of the house. In Anjali's case, she has failed to fulfil this responsibility because she has been unable to build intimacy with Nissanka. The gender inequality in social hierarchies, especially regarding matters of the house, is made evident here. The woman is burdened with social expectations, and the failure to fulfil them subjugates her further in everyday life. In the following section, I will discuss some possible reasons for such social expectations of the woman in the house.

## **The Woman of the House**

Pierre Bourdieu's description of the Kabyle house in Algeria exemplifies the gender distinction of the house (Carsten, 2004). The Kabyle house represents the threshold

between the world of women inside the house and the public world of a man outside the house (Carsten, 2004). For a woman, the household is a space in which they go about their tasks of cooking, looking after children and cleaning without any sense of restriction (Carsten, 1995). The freedom to behave and be in any way they like away from expected propriety makes the house a space for women to be dominant (Carsten, 1995, 1997). Even in Divulvæva houses are spaces where women dominate and freely interact with one another in the absence of men. A woman is dominant because she can determine how the house functions with her care and nurturing practices. A sense of trust is bestowed in the woman of the house by the other members as they give her access to their bodies. Eating cooked food from a house or exchanging food between houses signifies the trust others have of the woman who cooked the food. Bloch explains of commensality as a test to determine who can be trusted and not, which he exemplifies with the fear of poisoning among the Zafimaniry (Bloch, 1999). For instance, the midwife of the village, Gangā, told me of a woman who mixes sleeping pills in her husband's tea when he comes home drunk to stop him from abusing her. The woman within her role as caregiver has access to other inhabitant's bodies that she can care or hinder with the food she cooks. By nurturing children, she has access to mould them in ways that she thinks is proper. In caring for an inhabitant when sick, she has the power to shape care in ways that can quicken healing or not. It is this 'power of care' that makes a woman dominant within the house.

The woman of the house is also central in forming relationships with those outside of her house. I was told by a village elder that previously when people lived in thatched huts if the man was in the house or around, his bed and mat would be spread out on the veranda, but if he was out of the house, the bed and the mat would be kept aside. A visitor should be vigilant enough to know by these signs whether he should visit a house or not. I was told that if the woman is seen putting away her husband's mat when she sees a male visitor coming to her house, the man should know to turn around and go as it means that he is not welcome. Such rules and etiquette of visiting a house seem directly linked to male presence in a household. However, the rules of visitation that I observed in the village claimed that a visitor's relationship to the woman of the house as kin, kin-like or friend is what determines rights of visitation. Though a stranger may not be welcomed by a woman, a known person will be able to visit a house even if a man is not present. If the woman is alone in the house, she might keep the doors closed and not open the door to

strangers or people she does not want to engage with. The familiarity of the visitor can be judged by whether the visitor enters from the back door or the front door of the house. Those that enter through the back door are the most familiar to the woman. Most women would enter through back doors and spend time in each other's kitchens. Therefore, a woman can also determine visitation to her house.

The house's image as a 'good house' is also related to the public judgement of a woman's morality. The following incident will exemplify this: in her house, Vimalā had a milk mother's ceremony for her grandson in honour of the goddess Pathtini (cf. Gombrich, 1971). The women of the houses close to Vimalā's house gathered in her kitchen to help with preparations. I also accompanied Lakshmi to Vimalā's *gedara* to observe and engage in the preparations. When we arrived, a makeshift hearth was constructed in Vimalā's backyard just outside her kitchen, and Anoja was stirring the mixture for a sweetmeat called *dodol*. Vimalā explained to me that all food has to be prepared with extreme cleanliness as the ritual was for goddess Pathtini. The food cannot be tasted by anyone until it is served to the milk mothers (*kiri ammāvaru*) who perform the ritual. I recognised Vimalā's commitment to the ritual as she quickly wiped even a bit of the *dodol* mixture that was spilt on the ground with a cloth and put away the cloth in a separate bag ensuring not even an ant or a fly would taste the food. When Lakshmi and I walked back home after helping Vimalā for a good three hours, she told me, 'I do not know why Vimalā *nanda* got Anoja to help with preparing food for the *dāne* when she is known to have a bad character.' When I further inquired what she meant by this I realised that Anoja is known to have had relationships with several men, she has a daughter and a son from two different men and is currently having a relationship with the village postman.

A few weeks later Anoja had a milk mother's ceremony at her *gedara* and Lakshmi did not go to help out. She said, 'if gods visit houses like that they should live in houses like ours every day' (*oya vagē geval valata deviyo vadinavā nam apē geval vala hāmadāma inna one*). On the same day, I saw Lakshmi throwing away a plate of milk rice (*kiribath*) and sweetmeats. She told me that she threw the food away as it was sent from Anoja's *gedara* from her milk mother's ceremony. However, Lakshmi did not know for sure where the food came from because she was not at home when it was brought. Lakshmi's daughter Sumudu later told her that the food was given by Vimalā who was a milk mother (*kiri ammā*) at Niluka's milk

mother's ceremony earlier that day. On discovering this, Lakshmi was embarrassed and muttered, 'in vain!' (*aparade!*).

The exchange of food and help among women was a common feature of interaction between houses. What the above vignette illustrates is that the selection of houses to interact with was determined by the women's judgements about each other's moral standards. Lakshmi's response to Anoja indicated that she is not acceptable because she had inappropriate relations with men and had children by different fathers. This made Anoja an impure (*apirisiḍu*) woman in Lakshmi's eyes giving her reason to not interact with Anoja. Those who did interact with Anoja, like Vimalā, were condemned by Lakshmi because she believed that association with impure persons would contaminate. The rejection of food that Lakshmi thought was sent from Anoja's house demonstrated her rejection of Anoja. The impurity of the person is extended to her property as Lakshmi also did not visit Anoja or help her for the ceremony as she did with Vimalā. Lakshmi's statement that gods should live in her house indicates her own sense of her morality. This, in turn, is linked to the perceived morality of the house itself. The public perception that a woman is responsible for determining whether her abode is a 'good house' or a 'problem house' is shaped by the close association of the woman with her house. Therefore, the women in their roles as caregivers are responsible for building a family with the 'right' spouse, having legitimate children and managing the home economy in keeping with expectations regarding behaviour and sexuality. Failing in these responsibilities leads to her humiliation and the downgrading of the house in the village. As a result, women themselves identify with this responsibility and attempt to address problems in their houses strategically in order to maintain their position and status.

### **The Fault of the House**

When problems emerge in houses, villagers in Divulvæva looked for causes in the physical structure of their houses. It was a typical sight in the village to see people building and renovating houses close to April before the celebrations of *Avurudu*. It was not only about building half-built houses but also about demolishing built parts of houses and rebuilding. This sight of houses being demolished and rebuilt astonished me. I spoke with Karunā, a middle-aged woman with three children, whose house was being rebuilt, to understand why she had demolished most of the built structure. Karunā said to me,

Two houses could have been built with the money we spent renovating this house. We first built the house, as we wanted it. Then my husband fell sick. The astrologer told us that it is the fault of the house and to change the main door, and then another [astrologer] told to break down the fence on the veranda. If we start using the inside toilet, we should change where the hearth is. For now, the toilet is not built, so we do not use it. There was a fault in the beams of the roof too. We had to take down the roof and redo it. And he said [astrologer] to make a window for our daughter's room. Somehow, we have to do it because if not it will affect us.

This practice of renovating and rebuilding, as well as consulting astrologers, cause further delays in completing the house. Even if a house is half built, the villagers will make adjustments again by breaking what has already been constructed giving a reason as to why villagers rarely live in a completed house. Nevertheless, as they say, it is unavoidable because the faults in the structure of the house are said to impact their welfare.

Shānti too had consulted an astrologer to check the structure of their house after Anura passed away. When I asked her why she said,

I wanted to check if the structure of the house caused Anura to die. We don't know the impact of these things. But, the astrologer said that there were no harmful effects (*dosha*) that would have affected him. He suggested that we extend our veranda and clear the bushes in the front of the house so that we can see the playground. He said it is good for my mental peace (*manasika suvaya*).

I also saw that towards the side of Anjali's house, a string had been drawn, separating off an area. I inquired what the string was for when I saw her, and she replied, 'we are trying to build the kitchen for the house, the string is to show the area. The current hearth is not in the right direction. Ammā got Sunil (astrologer) to check our house, and he said that we should build a separate kitchen'. Sunil, I later learned is a middle-aged man who lives in Thambuttegama, about 15 kilometres away from the village. He reads horoscopes and

undertakes consultations to look for faults in houses that are causing problems to their inhabitants. When he visits a house for consultation in Divulvæva, all the neighbouring women request him to visit their houses too. He takes 500 rupees (GBP 2.50) from each house for his services and easily makes more than 3000 rupees (GBP 15) upon one visit to the village. The method he used to judge faults (*dosha*) in a house was called *vāsthū vidyāva* that translates as the ‘science of architecture’.

The core principle of the ‘science of architecture’ is that faults in the structure of the house cause problems to its inhabitants. The term *vāsthū* is a Sanskrit term that means dwelling house with its corresponding land (Gautum, 2006) whereas *vidyāva* translates as science or knowledge. In a literal sense, the term *vāsthū vidyāva* means the science or knowledge of building dwelling houses. When a house is being built, the principles of *vāsthū* have to be adhered to for the space to achieve equilibrium of energy, the human body, and the building. This will ensure material prosperity as well as mental peace, happiness and harmony for those who live in the house (Gautum, 2006). It is when this balance is disrupted that those who live in a house face problems. The method itself functions on the belief that the house and its inhabitants have one process of living. *Vāsthū vidyāva* implies that the household space should stimulate one to feel quintessential qualities of its intended purposes (Gautum, 2006). For instance, a dining room should stimulate hunger, a living room sociability, and a bedroom rest (Gautum, 2006). The direction that each room in a house faces and the direction in which objects such as the hearth are positioned are considered to impact on the inhabitants if not done correctly. Therefore when the villagers have problems, they consult astrologers like Sunil in the hope of solving them by restructuring the house.

I observed *vāsthū vidyāva* in action when Premalatā consulted Sunil because they were having financial problems in the house. Sunil walked around the house and said that they had lost all their ‘wealth luck’ (*dhana vāsanava*) because their house is very poorly built and does not adhere to the ‘science of architecture’. Sunil said that Premalatā’s house is full of *dosha* and advised her to change the main door, break the wall dividing their living room and dining room, and change the kitchen altogether by shifting it to the South East corner of the house. Sunil said that the hearth is burning all the wealth in the house because it is not built to the South East. Taking Sunil’s predictions to account Premalatā began to make changes to her house on the following day. She could not afford labour to do the

renovations to the house because they had no money. Nevertheless, she together with her husband, Jāgoda removed the main door to the house and closed the space with an old plywood sheet. Vimalā's husband Kalubandā also helped them. Together the two men broke a part of the front wall as Sunil said to, for the new main entrance of the house. A new main door had to be made because the measurements given for the new entrance were different to the old one. Premalatā and Jāgoda had no money for a new door, so they opted to use the old door to cover the gap. Figure 11 below illustrates the two gaps in the front of their house that they did not have money to cover for several months. The house was filled with dust and stray dogs, and Premalatā said to me that she is fed up with her *gedara* because she has no way to finish the renovation they started. She told me that it was also a security risk because anyone could enter the house. However, she said that after changing the main entrance of the house Jāgoda had secured a construction contract in Polonnaruwa. She said that with the money from this work they could finish the repair of the house. For Premalatā, the fact that Jāgoda found work also affirmed Sunil's predictions.

*Figure 11 The Gaps in Front of Premalatā's Gedara*



Piyasiri and Nandāvati also made changes to their house; Sunil had said that because the front roof was built incorrectly, it would not allow them to have wealth. Piyasiri noted that the existence of many black ants and caterpillars inside the house also signalled that there were faults. The roof of their front porch has three supporting beams. The central beam directly divides the main entrance into two. Such 'faults' in the building are



considered the fault of the house, which in turn makes wealth leave rather than remain. The flaws were also harming Piyasiri - the head of the household - as he was often falling and injuring himself. Nandāvati asked her son to come over one day and together with Piyasiri demolished the front porch and built a long veranda with pillars. Figure 12 below is a picture of their house changing faces to bring them more wealth and well-being. She said that she used the money she saved from selling betel plants and the money I gave her for renting two rooms in the house to do the renovation.

*Figure 12 Changing the Front of Nandāvati's Gedara*



Other's positive experiences of practising *vāsthū vidyāva* led to the popularity of it in Divulvæva. Premalatā described the practice in the following terms: 'that man (Sunil) breaks and changes all the houses in the village, but afterwards everyone becomes good' (*Ē minihā gamēma geval kadalā venas karanava. Ē vunath ita passē hari yanava*) indicating that they become materially prosperous or personally well after renovating the house. Influenced by Premalatā, Lakshmi who adamantly said that she did not believe in *vāsthū vidyāva* consulted Sunil when he came to the village. She said that she asked him whether the structure of the house gave a reason for her husband to leave for another woman. Lakshmi told me, 'that man [Sunil] said that our house has no big problem. The hearth is in the right place. But he said that the house is too dark, and we should make the windows bigger. He said to remove the fence around the veranda too for the universal energy (*vishva shakti*) to enter the house'. In consequence to such popularity astrologers like Sunil make a fortune with their 'knowledge of dwelling houses'. They explain the faults that are

causing problems to inhabitants who then, even without any money at hand, begin to restructure their houses.

A comment made by Premalatā indicated a possible explanation as to why the villagers' believe in restructuring houses to solve their problems. She said, 'families become problematic when the woman argues with the man for not earning enough money. After getting married both should know to share the suffering and comfort'. She explained to me that her husband Jāgoda was already married before he married her. As a result, he had to provide for two families. At times, he did not have enough work to earn for two families. Then, she said that she would start weaving mats or grinding spices to earn an extra income to support the family. She said, 'I never argued with him or blamed him for the suffering he caused me. That would have disrupted the family. He looked after my parents and siblings well. I always felt grateful for that'. By not blaming Jāgoda she had managed to preserve a 'good family life' in the house. Blame, especially for a man is a threat to his masculinity and is likely to increase the problems in the house by violence against the self or other (Widger 2012; 2015b). Therefore, by blaming the house for problems instead, a 'good family life' in the house is maintained. This strategy of projecting blame onto the house also maintains the public image of the house in the village. As a result, more than the astrologer's 'universal energy' it is the 'female energy' that solves the problems in the house by addressing faults in the physical structure. In the following section, I will illustrate the nature of this female energy.

### **Preserving the House**

The women identify with their responsibility to maintain the public image of the house by preserving a 'good family life' in the house. For instance, when I visited Latā and Navaratne's house for my survey, I learnt that Navaratne was suffering from kidney disease (*vakugadu amaruva*). When I listened to their life story, I learnt that their problems were deeper than Navaratne's illness. They had land from the MDP which they farmed and earned a livelihood from. However, a dispute over the land given to them had got them entangled in a long-drawn-out legal case for about 30 years. Navaratne said 'by the time we won the case we have grown old and lost energy to farm'. The tension created by the land issue in the house had led Navaratne to drink poison three times. Latā explained to me how she faced the problems in the house:

I was tolerant (*inasuna*), I always thought I would win one day. He would get drunk and hit me. He broke my arm once. But I was scared that he would abandon me with the children. I walk in the fields and do some work and forget the problem. If a woman has no tolerance, the family is over. Only a woman can make a man good or bad. I could tolerate, I used to think of the problems. I had no one to take advice. He will get angry and go away. But a woman cannot get angry.

Tolerance is then a virtue in a woman that helps her to face the problems in the house and keep the family together. A woman cannot get angry and leave the house like a man can because she is responsible for maintaining a 'good house'. The impact of the absence of women in the house is exemplified in cases where women had migrated to the Middle East for work (Gamburd, 2000, 2008b, 2013). The sheer movement of the woman from inside to outside, crossing the threshold, can turn a house into a 'problem house'. Moreover, Latā had hope that helped her to be tolerant of her life situation. She believed that she could make Navaratne a better man using her power of care. Being the dominant one in the house, the woman believes they can change circumstances by tolerating the present and hoping for a better future. When I asked her how she could tolerate such violence and the problems in the house, she explained:

My mother always told me to preserve my marriage (*digē kadā ganna epā*). A man will never bow down to a woman. My parents were very good. They do the housework together they go to the *chena* together, to bathe in the tank together. I remember what she told me. I taught my daughters the same. I taught them to cook and do farming. I would wake them early in the morning even on the weekend. Their father would say to let them sleep a bit longer as it is the weekend and I tell him that I have to teach them to be married without problems. My eldest daughter tells me of this even now. She has a good family life because I taught her well. Nowadays children break marriages because they have no tolerance. When my daughters tell me of problems, I tell them your mother had more problems than that and won so your problems are nothing. I have gained peace now because of my tolerance then.

The virtue of tolerance is passed down from mother to daughter from generation to generation as the mother's experiences of life compel her to prepare the daughter for the problems that she may face in future as a married woman. Marriage, considered an end in itself for a woman, makes tolerance essential. Though the woman is dominant in the house, the man will not 'bow down' to her for patriarchal reasons. Knowing this a woman has to be tolerant to keep her marriage and the house together. If a marriage breaks, the woman will be shamed and blamed by society and even scorned as a divorcee or literally 'marriage ajar' (*kasadē arila*). Therefore, daughters are encouraged to take their mothers as an example and tolerate the problems they might later face in their marriages. In her display of tolerance, Latā had set her daughters an example to follow. This tolerance has helped Latā to find peace (*śāntasīmā*); she and her husband are now aged and her children, now married, have left the house. When looking back in life, she feels victorious as she managed to keep her family together despite problems. Such women even get public appreciation for their capacity to preserve the marriage, as in the case of Manjulā.

Nandāvati introduced me to Manjulā saying 'this is a courageous woman' (*me inne dīriya kathak*). I was curious why she was given such a title. I had met her a couple of times around the village, and she always stopped to speak with me. I felt close enough to ask if I could talk to her about her life. She agreed and asked me to come by one afternoon. Manjulā lived with her husband Kumāra and their four children in Kumāra's ancestral house. Kumāra's grandfather used to treat for snake bites in the village. After his demise, no one in the family had continued the trade. Instead they had become farmers cultivating the land given by the MDP. The house was not maintained well, the paint on the walls was fading and the mortar was falling off revealing the mud bricks beneath. Her living room had a few odd chairs. I chose to sit in a plastic chair while she sat across from me on a wooden chair. I asked her how she came to marry Kumāra. She said,

I was 17 years when I married him. My grandparents arranged the marriage because they could not look after me anymore. I could not write for O/Ls because of that. He is good. But we were both young, and we did not know how to tackle problems. Now he is better. He used to drink with his friends then. Our main problem was financial issues. Our income was meagre.

The beginning of their marriage at a very young age was problematic because of Kumāra's drinking and financial issues shaping their house as a 'problem house'. I asked her how they managed the problems. She said,

I went for any wage labour jobs, I started work in the kitchen in hotel Haven, and I weaved coconut leaves and baskets. We used to sell them in front of our house. Still, I have cane (*pan*) to weave but less time to weave. I have to wash clothes of six people and all the housework in addition to my little jobs.

I realised that Manjulā's little jobs were not little at all but provided the bare necessities in the household. I imagined that with a drunkard husband her situation was similar to the situation in Anjali's house. However, it seemed that the couple had worked their way out of the problems and was currently in a better position.

At this point in our conversation, Kumāra came into the house, smiled and nodded at me as a greeting. Manjulā said that I had come to collect information for my research. Kumāra too sat on a chair next to Manjulā and joined our conversation. He explained to me that he has cattle and is pursuing dairy farming now as brick-making has become difficult with new legislation requiring a licence to obtain clay. It seemed that the family's financial situation had become better. I asked him why he is not farming paddy; he said,

I did not qualify to get land from MDP because I was too young and unmarried. I used, to farm on tenancy (*andê*). My parents gave me this house and the 0.5-acre homestead and gave the 2.5-acre paddy land to my brother. My brother shares the harvest with me. One season I took 10 acres to farm on tenancy, but the weather was so cruel and hindered my crop. I wanted to make a profit; the children were small, there were a lot of needs in the house. My idea was to hire labour and somehow make a good harvest. But, it rained heavily unexpectedly throughout for about a month when my paddy was just about to blossom.

Kumāra's narration of his paddy cultivation is an excellent example of the uncertain and unstable nature of the farmer's economy. As a father and a husband he was aware of his role as a provider and wanted to work to provide for them. However, the unpredictable weather had ruined his harvest. The cultivation being on tenancy created further problems because he had to pay back the landlords even though his crop had failed. He said,

I could not pay back the tenancy, but the landowners thought I was lying about the paddy and was trying to cheat them. I felt helpless, without a good harvest I could barely feed my family. I had no money to give the landowners. I could not sleep at night because of the debt issues. I would wake up and cry.

The inability to provide for his family, knowing that it is his responsibility, made him feel helpless. The fact he was reduced to tears signalled the turmoil he faced. He continued to say,

I took the one bag of rice we had in the house and sold it to buy a bottle of arrack. While drinking, I thought if I should live or die. When I came home, a landowner had come and shouted at her (Manjulā). She also shouted at me. I took the can of 'round up' and drank it while walking up the hill away from the house.<sup>13</sup> I started vomiting I think most of the poison was out because I vomited. Then some people took me to the hospital. It did not matter to me if I lived or died.

The male response to resort to drinking when there are problems has been explained as a release of their tensions (Gamburd, 2008a; Widger, 2015b). For a woman to see the man drinking on top of all the problems would be frustrating. By blaming Kumāra, Manjulā further escalated the tension that led to his suicide attempt. The incident stands as an example of why women are reluctant to blame men for problems in the house. Women's strategy to blame the house instead is to prevent such instances of violence in the house. This incident changed the dynamics within the house. Manjulā continued the story saying,

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<sup>13</sup> A weedicide used to kill weeds in paddy fields.

After that day I took the burden on to my shoulders, I knew that he could not handle the problems. I had to safeguard him. I started taking milk to the shop because I was worried that people would say things to him on the road. I put him behind me and faced the problems. People scolded me, but I tolerated it. I knew that I could tolerate more than him. It is difficult for him to tolerate.

Suicide and self-harm in Sri Lanka are understood to be instances to communicate to close kin what the individual cannot find words to say (Marecek, 1998, 2006; Marecek and Senadheera, 2012). Kumāra expressed his suffering and frustration of not being able to provide for his family with his suicide attempt. Manjulā understood his action as his inability to tolerate suffering. She then took the lead in the family and faced the world putting Kumāra behind her for his own safety. I asked her how she managed to tolerate the situation and she said,

I was a lost person I did not have anybody to share my sorrows with or even to tell my sorrows. I had no mother, father or a sibling. My grandparents did the best they can for me. I used to sell wood apple (*divul*) and bael fruit (*beli*) to find money to buy books for school. I like to learn, but I had no money for tuition classes. My plight was because I had no parents. I do not know who my father is but my mother died from drinking poison. I became helpless because of that. This is why I never think about killing myself no matter whatever the problems I have. I cannot die. I have to think of my children.

Exposure to problems in the house from a young age had enabled Manjulā to tolerate suffering. Her experience as a child made her aware of her young children and their need to be provided for and cared for. Her life experience had enabled her to understand her responsibility as a caregiver to her children which she extended by becoming a provider for the house. Her capacity to tolerate suffering and change the life situation of her family is the reason she is known of in the village as a courageous woman. Therefore, even without an example or socialisation to tolerate, women find the capacity to be tolerant from life experience itself. They identify with the social expectation of a woman's responsibility in the house and with tolerance attempt to fulfil their responsibility.

Manjulā explained this further saying,

I know there are women who breakdown for the slightest problem, I tell them to take me as an example. We are still paying the debt, but it is better now. The children have grown up. My eldest is sitting for A/Is this year.<sup>14</sup> They also help us with work now. We managed to buy four cows that bring us a good income now. Suffering is common to all. It is by suffering that you learn about life. We do not examine life with happiness. There is no point in having wealth if the man does not love the woman. There are no fights between us. We are like one. I feel like I have won the battle now. You have to fall to find the strength to get up.

Manjulā now considers herself to be a successful woman. Kumāra has now stopped drinking with friends and is working hard to improve their dairy farm. The children have grown and are helping on the farm. For Manjulā this is a victory similar to winning a battle. She has managed to fulfil her responsibility with practices of care and maintain a ‘good family life’. Manjulā’s narrative brings prominence to the idea that having wealth is secondary to the *badima* between the couple to build a ‘good house’. Whatever stage the structure of the house is in, the problems can be solved and the ‘good family life’ retained if the conjugal couple lives in harmony. However, the loss of the *badima* or the intimacy between conjugal couples means that houses remain as ‘problem houses’. In the following chapter, I will further detail how ‘problem houses’ escalate in suffering from the loss of *badima*.

## Concluding Reflections

Houses in Divulvæva reflect the lives of those that live within them. Taking a female perspective, I have attempted to explain how houses become spaces for building marriages, families and relationships that are family-like or neighbourly. Focusing more on marriages and family life in the house, I have explained how houses are not only indicators of wealth but also of ‘good family life’. The increase of nuclear-type households in the village has given more responsibility to conjugal couples to manage their family

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<sup>14</sup> Advance Level Examination is a qualifying exam for tertiary level education.



lives. As a result, most houses evolve in a way that reflects the development of intimacy between the couple. Owing to this tendency houses have become markers of successful marriages and family lives. When houses fail to remain as 'good houses' the woman is blamed for failing in her responsibility as a caregiver to maintain family life. The linkage between the woman and her house is drawn due to her dominance in the household space. In consequence, women themselves identify with their responsibility to maintain a 'good family life' and strategise to preserve their houses as a 'good house'. One strategy is to project blame for problems in the house onto the structure of the building and attempt to solve them by restructuring. The second method is the woman's capacity to tolerate suffering. In this manner, women preserve their houses and family lives carefully, indicating the connection between the woman and her house.

## Chapter 5

### Unseen Wounds: Afflictions and Retaliations in the House

When I met Lakshmi in the latter part of 2015, hers was one of the few families in Divulvæva with a completed modern house. The house was built at the centre of their 0.5-acre land. Mango trees grown around the house gave it shade from the hot sun. The garden was well kept with lots of flowers blooming. In the backyard, a bathing spot with a small tank was built for the family to cool off in the hot weather. A few jack trees and bread-fruit trees gave shade to the back garden. The house itself was painted yellow and had a tiled veranda with plastic chairs to sit on. A white cement fence around the veranda protected it from being a sleeping spot for stray dogs. When I visited her house, it felt very cool despite the hot weather. Inside, the house was well furnished, unlike most other village households I had been to. It was a four-bedroom house with an inside toilet - a rare luxury for many households. They had an electronics shop in town that Upul, Lakshmi's husband, had inherited from his father. The couple together had developed the shop after marriage and grown in wealth. They owned a white Toyota van, a motorbike and a scooter. Lakshmi travelled around on the scooter while Upul either used the van or the motorbike. The couple had a 15-year-old daughter, Sumudu, and a 12-year-old son, Kavidu. Lakshmi's household gave the appearance of an ideal house that most families in the village were aspiring to have. However, when I came to understand Lakshmi better, a very different story unfolded.

Despite the appearance, Lakshmi's house was well-known for being a place where a family with problems lived. The first time I visited her for my household survey, she briefly told me of her family problem (*pavul prashne*) saying, 'he has taken another woman' (*ñ vena gæniyek aragena*). She went on to say, 'I am waiting for the court case to be heard now, I need mental peace (*mānasika sahanaya*) more than anything'. The 'mental peace' Lakshmi referred to indicated the suffering she was experiencing due to the problems in the house. Giving voice to Lakshmi's suffering in this chapter I will explore how women are subjugated within the domestic space when disputes arise. The reproduction of social hierarchies in relation to domestic disputes further escalates the suffering faced by women. Their responsibility as caregivers is exploited by children, affines, kin, friends and even the state, in ways that, intentionally or unintentionally, intensify women's suffering. From within this position of subjugation, women navigate their relationships in efforts to restore a 'good family life' in a 'problem house'. In managing their suffering women

express anger and may resort to violence. Social responses to these acts are often ambivalent in that they are both approved of and disapproved of by the community. Women's actions of this kind demonstrate what Sara Ahmed refers to as a complex 'sociality of emotions' (Ahmed, 2014). Before engaging with Lakshmi's narrative in detail, however, I provide a brief overview of the literature on suffering.

## **Unseen Wounds**

Anthropologists have approached the human experience of suffering across different scales, from the social to the subjective. The inequality bred by social hierarchies such as wealth, class, and race has been defined as a cause of social suffering linking with ideas of social misery (Bourdieu, 1999). Moreover, social suffering is extended in the responses to social misery by political, economic, and institutional powers (Kleinman, Das and Lock, 1997). Historical moments such as China's cultural revolution, the partition of India, and the Holocaust have been discussed as instances of mass social suffering (Das, 1996; Harrington, 1996; Langer, 1997; Schwarcz, 1997; Tu, 1997). Social suffering has also been described concerning health, death, widowhood, poverty, political violence, and immigration (Farmer, 1996; Asad, 1997; Daniel, 1997; Lock, 1997; Ramphela, 1997). However, in these various causes of suffering gender inequality creates different experiences. For instance, women in the partition of India faced more suffering than men by being subjected to rape and abduction (Das, 1996, 2007). However, as Das argues these women's suffering was 'silenced' in the folds of the everyday owing to their subjugation (Das, 2007).

For an ethnographer to be able to explain the subjective experience of suffering, the guiding hand of someone who has had that kind of sensory experience is necessary (that is, someone who has touched, smelled, tasted, and seen violence) (Das, 2017). Das explains the ability to appreciate another's suffering is a form of 'companionable thinking' (Das, 2017). It is by such experience of the other that an ethnographer will be able to describe suffering that is 'hidden' (Das, 2007; Rechtman, 2017) or as I refer to it in the Sri Lankan context as unseen wounds. Expressing suffering in everyday settings works like echoes which 'bounce' between self and other, sometimes including the ethnographer (Rechtman, 2017). The encounter with this echo, however, may be fragmented, that is, made up of partial stories or narratives, which nonetheless need to be recorded

(Rechtman, 2017). In Lakshmi's narrative, I describe how her children, her affines, her family by descent, her neighbours, friends, co-villagers and the state each provided part of the story.

Hoggett and Frost explain that suffering impacts on an individual's ability to reflect on its causes and to 'think' or 'think through' how to respond appropriately (Hoggett and Frost, 2008, p. 439). In relation to her research in low-income neighbourhoods in Delhi, India, Das describes this aspect of suffering as 'affliction' (Das, 2015). The affliction is explained as a 'corrosion of everyday life that seems to take away from many the capacity to engage in life' (Das, 2015, p. 2). The loss of capacity she highlights is influenced by who and what caused, altered, and intensified the suffering (Das, 2015). In so doing, she draws attention to the relational aspects of suffering by describing the role of family, neighbours, occultist healers, medical practitioners, and the global pharmaceutical market in causing individual suffering (Das, 2015). The afflictions of the individual that Das explains adds another layer to mental or physical ailments that may already be there (Das, 2015). Das opens the conversation about suffering in the everyday to illustrate the human capacity to reverse affliction (Das, 2015). However, returning to Lakshmi's narrative, I will illustrate how she lost the capacity to engage in life and also how she managed to rework her affliction to bring public attention to her problems. Though her suffering was not resolved, the story demonstrates how this is a strategy available to women (Nabokov, 1997).

The suffering women experience in domestic spaces is an 'unseen wound' because it is expected that they will simply tolerate everyday problems (as explained in chapter four). It is indeed seen as part of her responsibility as a caregiver to be tolerant in the face of domestic problems. Yet, public knowledge of an 'unseen wound' is limited. For instance, though the villagers could point to Lakshmi's house and explain the problems, none of them could articulate the nature of her suffering to me. Once I became close to Lakshmi, I began to understand what she has faced and the effects that it had had on her and the strategies that she has used to deal with it.

## **The Problem**

I was a paradox to Lakshmi; she wondered out loud how I, being an unmarried woman, could come to an unknown village that I had no connection to and live among them. My

way of life was alien and strange to her as it was to most women in the village. However, I also felt that the fact that I was able to live differently gave them a sense that it is possible only if they had educated themselves rather than entering into marriage early in life. Lakshmi and I became close because she invited me over to her house for meals and visited my two rented rooms often. She could not reason why she felt close to me or why she felt connected to me. She justified it as an act of fate; I must have been her sister in a previous life and referred to me as ‘my sister like’ (*mage nangi vage*). The connection we formed enabled me to enter into her life world and witness her unseen wound caused by her family problem. I had the privilege to live in Lakshmi’s house for about two months which also helped me gain a better view of her lived experience of suffering.

The problem in Lakshmi’s house was that her husband Upul had an affair with another married woman called Rasika. I was told that Rasika has had similar affairs with other wealthy businessmen in town and is alleged to have ‘broken’ their marriages and families. Rasika had entered Upul’s life when she came to his electronics shop to fix her television. Lakshmi explained to me how she got to know of their affair,

I am a very clean (*pirisidu*) person; I clean the house and the toilets every day. Even if I go on a trip, I am very careful about using public toilets. So, when Upul got syphilis, I became suspicious. I am so clean then how did he get syphilis? I prayed to god; I told god to show me if this man is doing wrong. Then I had a dream to look at his account books. When I checked his books, I saw entries for hotel bills, entries mentioning them going out and the money he gave her. That woman had slept with this man for even 100 rupees (GBP 0.50).

Being ‘clean’ for Lakshmi was not just about hygiene; it was about the purity that comes from being loyal within marriage. What contaminates marriage is when a spouse transgresses norms and seeks sexual relations with other men or women. Such contamination has been described as ‘lust’ when a spouse ‘takes sexuality out of the house’ (de Munck, 1998). For Lakshmi, Upul’s actions were ‘unclean’ and had a sense of being ‘something dirty’. The thought of this was a cause of great distress for Lakshmi.

Upul's actions represented a breach of trust that undermined the family life Lakshmi had lovingly created with him for 16 years. Her initial response to the problem was explained in the following way:

I felt like breaking the earth and disappearing, I felt like setting myself on fire. I felt polluted. He slept with that woman and me. I argued with Upul and shouted at him to leave my sight. Then I bathed. I bathed for a long time. When I came into the house, he had left taking his clothes in the van to his *nangi's* house in Kandy.

Lakshmi's description gives a strong sense of how the pain she felt was embodied. Her pain was expressed in thoughts to burn herself. The contamination was of her body as well as everything she believed and thought to be true. She had eloped with Upul at the age of 17 defying her family and developed a life with him. She attempted to cleanse her body of the contamination by bathing. Water with its power to clean, to quench, and to cool was her response to the crisis. Upul in being confronted by his secret life left the house and, by taking refuge in his sister's house, alerted the extended family to what was happening at home. The sister had intervened to solve the problem between the couple by convincing Lakshmi that Upul was innocent and that she had misunderstood. The sister had reminded Lakshmi of her responsibility as a mother and a wife to maintain a 'good family life'. Then, Lakshmi had gone to Kandy to bring Upul home. Lakshmi said that she thought to forgive Upul and hoped that he would not repeat the same behaviour.

After returning from Kandy Lakshmi said that they resumed their normal life. However, she continued to doubt his fidelity, and this led to constant arguments. Upul complained to his mother about Lakshmi's doubts and the effect it was having on their home life. Together they concluded that she had mental problems (*mānasika prashna*). Lakshmi's behaviour was a problem that was in her head. As a result, Upul had taken Lakshmi to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist decided that she had symptoms of depression and gave her medicine asking them to come back in two weeks. Lakshmi said that the medication made her feel drowsy and put her to sleep. When they went to see the psychiatrist the second time he asked Upul to leave the room and spoke to Lakshmi alone. This gave her a chance to explain her doubts about Upul in detail. After listening to her story, the psychiatrist said 'it is not you who have mental problems but your husband' and stopped giving her

any treatment. Lakshmi said that even after the psychiatrist stopped treatment, Upul still tried to convince her that her doubts were, in fact, a mental problem. She said ‘he would say my head is not good and that’s why I doubt him’ (*magē oluwa boda nāthi nīsalu mama ūva sēka karanne*). By attempting to convince Lakshmi that her doubts were the result of a mental problem, Upul was projecting blame on Lakshmi for the problems in their house. Lakshmi’s suffering, caused by his acts, had now become the fault of her mind. Upul even tried to convince Lakshmi’s siblings of this and that it was she who was creating problems in their family life.

Lakshmi explained to me that once, when her elder brother Ajith, who lives in the southern town of Tangalle, came to see her, Upul had said ‘this woman is crazy, she doubts me about things I never did’. Ajith, knowing his sister well and probably even having evidence of Upul’s extramarital relationship had become furious and said ‘you don’t want a crazy woman, but for us, our *nangi* is not too much even if she is crazy’. He had asked Lakshmi to leave Upul and come with him to Tangalle. Lakshmi explained to me that when she was contemplating what to do her daughter Sumudu came to her crying and said ‘*ammā*, I’ll tell you one thing, *tāhtā* is trying to get you out of the house, so *ammā*, please don’t go’. Lakshmi said to me ‘even at the age of 14 my daughter was intelligent; I realised what she said was true he wanted me out so he can bring her in. I decided to stay’. For Lakshmi, the house represented everything she had built after marriage. The thought of losing the house was an existential crisis for her. The idea of another woman taking her place in the house that she built stopped her leaving. Her decision meant that she was willing to put up with mental and physical abuse to protect her house. The problems became heightened, and Lakshmi began to sleep with her daughter, Sumudu, thereby distancing herself from Upul.

Lakshmi went on to explain, ‘I was scared that I will catch some disease from him, so I refused to be with him. This made him angry. I went to sleep with Sumudu, but he would try to grab me when I walked in the house. I screamed and shouted’. It was clear that Upul was violently trying to gain access to Lakshmi’s body. Lakshmi’s refusal of Upul’s approach was a challenge to what he saw as his marriage right (*kasāda aiyyiya*). This tension led to domestic violence. Upul once kicked Lakshmi in the stomach when they were fighting which caused her severe pain. Her stomach pain became so unbearable that she had to consult a female physician. The physician had asked her if she had any mental

problems giving her a chance again to relate her painful suffering to an outsider. Lakshmi said, 'the doctor was kind. She was a woman, so she understood. She told me, men are dogs and I should be strong. She admitted me to the hospital for two days. She did tests for sexual diseases, and I had not got anything. Upul didn't want me admitted, but the doctor insisted, and he had no choice. That doctor gave me strength; she told me to make my heart strong'. The intervention by the physician was more than medical. Lakshmi felt that the physician, being a woman, could relate to her pain. The physician's encouragement had made her realise that how she thought about her body, her doubts, her pain and suffering were not simply internal but caused by what was happening outside. It is at this point she said that she began to see Upul as separate from her and she began to un-make the *baedima* she had with him. She spoke of him as an abusive man, dishonest and manipulative, who was inflicting pain on her.

Lakshmi's difficulties peaked when Rasika entered her house when she had gone to Tangalle to attend Ajith's daughter's puberty ceremony. She and her two children had gone to the ceremony with her second elder brother Nihal. Lakshmi described the events:

When I was in Tangalle, I got a call from Mādhavi (her friend). She said 'that woman (Rasika) had come to the house'. Even before, I had seen her going on our road on her scooter. She waited till I am gone to enter my house. I wanted to go back immediately, but Nihal *aiyā* said we might as well stay the night and go the next day after the ceremony. I called Upul and scolded him. I shouted, 'did you brought in a bitch (*balliyek*) to the house that I keep like a temple?' When I got home the next day, I hit him with a broom. I burnt all the bed sheets and threw away all the food. Upul was saying that she forced her way in. I then went to that woman's house with Nihal *aiyā* and shouted at her husband and family there too. She was not in, or I would have killed her. I was that angry.

Rasika's entry to the house in Lakshmi's absence was a severe breach of domestic etiquette. Her entry, as Lakshmi claimed, had further contaminated the cleanliness of her house. Significantly, she refers to her house as a 'temple'. This simile highlights the links between morality, the house and monogamous marriage. Her reference to Rasika as a 'bitch' suggests her contempt towards Rasika. Lakshmi, beating Upul with a broom that



is a tool used to sweep off dirt, signifies that Upul is also like dirt that needs to be swept off. Meanwhile, burning bed sheets and throwing away food highlights the link between sex and food in Sinhala culture (Leach, 1961; Yalman, 1967). She was attempting to rid her house of the contamination caused by Upul's and Rasika's unsolicited relationship.

The incident caused talk in the village about Lakshmi's house. The villagers had put up a public proclamation nailed to the mango tree in the middle of the village (*kālapatharaya*) saying 'Upul brings prostitutes to the house' (*Upul gedarata ganikāvo genei*). Lakshmi's son Kavidu had seen the posters around the village and brought one home for Lakshmi to see. Lakshmi's neighbours had come out of their houses and stared at her house in disgust and hooted when Rasika was inside. Premalatā, Lakshmi's neighbour and a friend had gone into the house to find Upul and Rasika sitting on the sofa cuddling and holding hands. She had looked at Upul and told him '*putā*, this is not right, is it?' and had walked out. By calling Upul 'son' (*puta*), Premalatha indicated her status as an elder and alerted him to the wrongfulness of his actions. It was after this intervention, that Rasika had left the house. The villagers' reaction to the problem in Lakshmi's house indicates a collective concern with moral standards. Upul was transgressing the normative values of 'good family life'. The villagers' actions aimed to humiliate Upul using shame-fear so that he might change his behaviour. However, the incident had the opposite effect, as Upul began to associate with Rasika openly. As Lakshmi explained to me: 'he would stay in the house on weekdays and go out with her on weekends. When he is here, he keeps texting her. He had no shame. Everyone got to know. People came to tell me about seeing them here and there'.

Meanwhile, Upul stopped giving Lakshmi money for household expenses. He expressed this in crude terms which rendered their relationship wholly instrumental: 'I gave you food to eat because you slept with me, but now you do not so I will not give you food, go and eat from your father'. The indication to go back to eat from her father illustrates that he is returning Lakshmi to the care of her father who was her provider before she eloped with him. As a girl child, Lakshmi was provided for and protected by her father and brothers (her mother died when she was four years old). Then by marrying her, Upul took on the role of providing for and protecting her. Upul was frustrated by Lakshmi's refusal to have sex with him and was responding by refusing to provide for her. After such insolent remarks, Lakshmi said that she did turn to her father for support. Lakshmi's

father and brothers advised her to file a maintenance case (*nadaththu naduva*) against Upul because he was responsible for providing for the children even if not for Lakshmi. The maintenance case was resolved in the first hearing itself with Upul being instructed to give Lakshmi 25,000 rupees (GBP 125) every month for expenses. He had agreed to pay for the children's tuition fees, food, and utility bills separately. The ending of commensality between the couple and no longer having sexual relations signified the extent of the rupture of their marriage. Upul left the house on his birthday in November 2015 and moved into a house on rent with Rasika in Anuradhapura.

A common idiom used to refer to 'problem houses' in the village was to say that 'the house is ablaze' (*gedara gini aran*). This meant that the house, a powerful symbol of marriage and family life (as discussed in chapter four) is consumed by problems. Lakshmi too constantly referred to her suffering as a fire (*gindarak*), just as Mihiri and Shānti had done. Lakshmi explained how her experience of uncleanness, impurity, doubt, blame, abuse, anger and the ending of commensality gradually destroyed her marriage. This pattern was similar to how a fire spreads, devastating everything in its way. Upul's actions transgressed the social ideals of marriage, house, and family life. Lakshmi by not tolerating this also transgressed the social ideals of a woman, wife and mother. The public expression of her difficulties brought it to others' attention. The response by the public did not however, resolve the problems or heal Lakshmi's suffering. Nevertheless, those inside the house acted in ways that showed their capacity to retaliate.

### **The Fire inside the House**

The 'fire' that Lakshmi described spread and her children, Sumudu and Kavidu, were also metaphorically burnt. Lakshmi explained to me that Upul shouted and hit her one day when she switched on the mains electricity in the house which he had just switched off. She said, "he does things like that to make us hate the house and leave the house. Kavidu tried to stop Upul when he was hitting me; he said 'if you hit *ammā* again I swear I will kill you'. Upul is such a sinner to hear such words from his son". Lakshmi used her children to protect herself from Upul by having them escort her around the house when he was around. Lakshmi told me how Upul scolded Sumudu when she tried to save Lakshmi from his abuse, 'he scolded Sumudu too when she came to save me asking "aren't you ashamed to eat from my house?"' Then Sumudu said he should be ashamed of what he

does, and he tried to hit her. I was scared that he will hit my children'. Children, therefore, become one mechanism that women use against domestic violence to protect themselves. However, domestic violence also has an impact on the children. Indeed, when Upul left the house the children were relieved because the violence stopped. However, a different type of dynamic emerged between Lakshmi and the children in the house after their father left.

The parents used the children as 'go-betweens' to exchange messages and to induce guilt in one another. For instance, on one occasion when I was in Lakshmi's house she asked Sumudu to call Upul and ask for money for tuition fees and to repair her scooter. The phone was put on speaker for us all to hear. Upul said that he would give money for tuition but not to repair the scooter. This was because Lakshmi used the scooter. Upul said 'why your *athā* said that he is a man of money, ask him for money!' Lakshmi was fuming mad when Sumudu hung up without answering Upul's remark. She hit Sumudu's back with her hand and said 'this one cannot even speak properly to him, couldn't you say that the scooter is used to take you to school and for classes? If it is broken how can I take you? Ask him to send a three-wheeler then!' Sumudu started to cry 'don't you see *ammā* he does not like to speak with us, what can I do?' On another occasion, Sumudu was sent to the shop to ask for their digital camera. When she came home, she said to Lakshmi '*ammā* he has brought that woman to the shop. She was there. She went to the back when she saw me'. Sumudu said that she left as soon as Upul gave her the camera without saying anything. Lakshmi said 'you should have asked the man (Upul) who that is'. She then turned to Kavidu and said 'go and tell him a good two things, this is all because we keep silent' (*gibilla kiyanavakō hoda pada dekek, api sadda nethuva innakota thamai okkoma*). When close friends and neighbours visit the house, the children are advised to go to the shop to remind Upul of his obligations to them. Vimalā, Lakshmi's neighbour and a friend said 'Kavi you should go and ask for money, if he does not give, you should open the drawer and take money, it is your right.' In this way, the children get caught up between the parents and are used as proxies in their disputes.

The children were closer to Lakshmi because she had looked after from birth and they depended on her. They were old enough to realise that their father had transgressed normative values in marriage life and broken their home. Once Kavidu came home from school and told Lakshmi, '*ammā* a boy in my class asked me if our *tāthā* had taken another

woman to go around with?'. Such public statements humiliated the children and made them think badly about their father. The children didn't directly indicate any hate towards the father for what he had done to their family. However, once when I stayed over at their house, Kavidu took out some of Upul's clothes and dressed their dog in them. He called us to show what he had done and said 'the clothes fit the dog perfectly'. His comment and his actions, for me, indicated how he thought of his father and the hate he felt for him. The children were concerned about their mother and tried to make her laugh and keep her happy. During a conversation about finding a proper suitor for Sumudu, Kavidu said that before the sister's marriage he wants to get a suitor for his mother. He told Lakshmi that he would get her a better man with hair on his head, unlike Upul who was bald. We all laughed at his comment, but I realised that it was more than humour for Kavidu. He was comforting his mother by making her think that she could find a better man than Upul. The mother and two children became closer and supported each other to fill the vacuum created by Upul's absence. For instance, when Sumudu had tuition classes at night Kavidu would accompany Lakshmi on her two-seater scooter to pick her up. The three of them would huddle onto the small red scooter hugging each other to secure themselves from falling off. The image of them on the scooter made me think of how they are hugging each other in life in the absence of a father to protect and provide for them.

Kavidu at 12 years old was expected to take over the role of the father by at least being a protector. I heard people say to him: 'Kavi now you are the only man in this house, you have to look after your mother and sister'. He tried to carry off this undue responsibility as best he could. For instance, he would always check if all the windows and doors were locked before he went to sleep. If Lakshmi was watching television or doing work in the kitchen, he would sit on a chair and wait until she was ready to go to bed. Sometimes I saw him fall asleep on a chair, hesitant to go to bed until his mother did. He attempted to fix broken pipes and replace bulbs around the house. He ran errands for his mother. However, the undue responsibility given to Kavidu also led him to be arrogant and stubborn.

Kavidu began to defy Lakshmi's authority and become what the villagers called a 'rowdy' (*rasthiyādukāraya*). One day, Lakshmi caught him in an Internet café in town playing video games instead of going to school. Lakshmi dragged him home by his ear and hit him with

a stick leaving marks on his back. She was very angry with the boy. She kept saying ‘are you trying to be like that man? I am going through all this suffering for you, and this is what you do?’ Sumudu and I had to restrain Lakshmi who was crying in anger. Lakshmi said she scolded the café owner too for letting children into the café during school hours. Her concern was that Kavidu would become like Upul in character. On another day Kavidu had taken Lakshmi’s scooter and gone riding it around the village. This again caused an uproar as Lakshmi got angry and hit him. Kavidu then began to go to his friend’s house after school rather than coming home. Lakshmi allowed this because she thought it was good for him. She said ‘I know Kavidu’s friend’s parents very well. They love him like their own. He is a child still. It’s good for him to be with them, he must be bored in this house’. In the eyes of the villagers it was a different story; women I met referred to Kavidu and said ‘he has started to go gallivanting (*rasthiyāduve*) hasn’t he? This is what happens to children when parents do not behave right!’.

Sumudu, on the other hand, was focused on passing her ordinary level examination. She comforted Lakshmi saying ‘*ammā*, don’t worry I will educate myself and get a job. Then I will buy a car and take you in the front seat around town’. However, I heard rumours from Anushā and Mādhavi that Sumudu had a love relationship with a boy in the village. They predicted that the problems at home would make her a ‘ripened girl’, and she would elope. I didn’t have substantial evidence that she was having a love relationship. Sumudu did like to dress well for her tuition classes where she would get a chance to interact with boys. I thought her behaviour was similar to any teenage girl her age. However, I realised that the age was also a cause for suspicion as it was the ‘bad age’ when girls had love relationships and eloped (explained in chapter three). Lakshmi had given Sumudu an old mobile phone for emergencies. One morning when I had stayed over at their house, I heard Lakshmi hitting Sumudu and shouting at her for using the mobile phone. Sumudu started to cry saying that she was texting a friend. Lakshmi came out of the room and told her that she would break the phone if she found her meddling with it again. I realised that Lakshmi (just like Anushā and Mādhavi) had suspicions of Sumudu having a love relationship. Other than the ‘bad age’, their experiences of other similar ‘problem houses’ in the village, informed their suspicions. They told this to me as ‘when there are problems children look for better lives out of the house by getting involved in love relationships’.

Being caught up in their parents' disputes, caused much distress to the children. The everyday violence they witnessed normalised this as a response to conflict and one that they might use in future when they encounter similar problems (Widger, 2015a). The children being closer to the mother, took her side and tried to help her. They tried to take on responsibilities in the house to ease her burden. However, they also exploited the flux in authorities in the house by being stubborn. The short-term response by the children had long-term consequences because they were at risk of becoming a 'rowdy' and a 'ripened girl'. Their education might be disrupted leading to future problems getting good employment. On the other hand, even though the children were acting in ways that were similar to the behaviours of other children of their age, the fact that they lived in a 'problem house' shaped other's perceptions of them as potentially problematic. Lakshmi attempted to fulfil her responsibility as a mother by disciplining them, often violently. Her worry was that the children would turn out to be of bad character and have disrupted lives. However, her actions drove them away from the house. In this manner, the suffering of Lakshmi's family intensified.

### **The Spread of Fire outside the House**

A marital dispute, such as Lakshmi's, is intensified, either intentionally or unintentionally, by others connected to the couple. Kin, affines and friends all played a part in helping but also at times making the problem worse. Opinions, suspicions, rumour and gossip, concerning Lakshmi's difficulties all added to her distress. Her expectation was that kin, affines and friends would side with her ignoring and 'cornering' (*kon karanava*) Upul. Upul's mother and sisters appeared to be on her side at the beginning. Lakshmi believed their support for her was because Upul's father had been of a similar character and they had experienced similar treatment by him. I was told that Upul's mother was thrilled when Upul's father finally died. She had not cared for him when he fell sick. The absence of care had aggravated his illness and quickened his death. At his funeral, the mother had not cried or shown any remorse. She had even been eating good food and laughing which indicated to others that 'the funeral was like a party for her'. Their common advice to Lakshmi, however, was not to divorce Upul. The main reason they gave her was that she had no skill to earn money and make a living for her and her children. For this reason, they said that she should get back together with Upul. The underlying reason for such advice was also due to the shame involved in a divorce which would affect their

reputation. The impact of this shame was explained to me by Upul's second sister; she said, 'we are trying to bring them together; it is such a shame for us. We have one more *nangi* to give in marriage too'. The affines' response to the marital dispute was to push Lakshmi to be a responsible and tolerant caregiver.

I witnessed their attempt to bring the couple back together when after about three months he had moved to a rented house with Rasika, Upul came back to his mother's house and asked her to convince Lakshmi to accept him back. Lakshmi was furious when Upul's mother called and asked her to take him back. Lakshmi asked her,

If I did the same would you have asked Upul to accept me back? Is he coming back with clothes on? Can't he remember how people hooted at our house when he bought that woman in? What about the posters (*kala pattara*) in the village? I took him back three times - that is enough.

However, Lakshmi also knew that she could not stop him from coming to the house because it was legally his. She said to me, 'I know he owns this house and he can come if he wants, but I am not going to go and bring him back, he went out on his own'. Lakshmi knew that if she went to Upul's mother's house and brought Upul back, that would be a gesture of forgiveness and this would have helped him to recover his lost honour in the village.

Within a few days, Lakshmi again received a call from Upul's mother saying that Rasika came to her house and went back with Upul in the van to their rented house. Upul's mother had been angry and had shouted at both of them. Lakshmi went to see her and upon return told me,

She had lost her voice shouting; she had cursed them. She had said that I am her *lēli* and that I am so pure, seeing me is fulfilling (*dakkath bada pirenava*). That woman had said that she could not live without Upul. She had even tried to commit suicide by jumping into the well. *Ammā* had said to Upul that he is a sinner and she and her daughters will not keep relations with him anymore. He had said he is helpless and has no consolation from anywhere. *Ammā* has cursed saying that he will have to

suffer for the fire he gave everyone (*umba dīpu gindarata umbata vidavanna venava*). Then they had gone in the van. *Ammā* said that woman (Rasika) got in the front seat; she said that she could not bear to see her taking my place.

Upul's mother too was clearly suffering because of her son's behaviour which no doubt reminded her of his father's. She saw aspects of her own experience in Lakshmi's condition and was sympathetic to her. Upul, on the other hand, was guilty and ashamed of what he had done and expected Lakshmi to come and forgive him. His helplessness led him to see Rasika as the only person who loved him – as someone who would even die for him. The attempted reconciliation and Upul's mother's anger towards him and Rasika made Lakshmi believe that her affines were on her side and had now disowned Upul.

In April, on *Avurudu* day in 2016, I was staying over at their house to celebrate *Avurudu* with Lakshmi and her children. During the day they went over to visit Upul's mother with some sweetmeats and a packet of biscuits. She came back in half an hour in tears saying 'ammā has taken Upul and Rasika into the house. That means she has given her approval for them' (*gedara athulata gathā kiyanne kamaṭhā dunnā kijana eka ne*). She called Upul's sister in Kandy and told her the story in tears. The sister agreed with Lakshmi and promised to speak with the mother. Lakshmi said, "they are one blood, they do not care (*un okkoma ekama le, unta ganak na*), that unmarried sister of Upul's told me. She was also there with *ammā*; she said '*aiyā* is doing his duties to you and the children'. They think giving money is everything!". Lakshmi explained to me that Upul's mother told them of the visit at the doorstep even before they entered the house. She described the meeting:

Didn't even let us in and give us food and drink before telling the story, she kept us out and took that dog and bitch into the house. She even said that my son could become like that and as a mother, I will also have to face the same situation. They have no heart they will do anything for money. They are not like my father and siblings. They are outsiders. You cannot trust them.



Lakshmi was convinced that her affines had turned against her. Her view of Upul's mother and his sisters changed in a second. Taking Upul and Rasika into the house but not taking Lakshmi and her children in signalled to her that Upul and Rasika were welcomed over and above Lakshmi and her children. As Upul's mother reasoned, he was after all her son, she couldn't turn him away and disown him. Their connection, it would seem, persists no matter what wrong he does. This episode escalated the dispute, and Lakshmi distanced herself from her affines. Then she decided that it was only those in her own family (*mage pavulē aya*), that is those related by blood (*le naedāyo*) that could care for her and her children.

When Upul was living in the house, Lakshmi's father and siblings stopped visiting because they were angry with Upul. However, once he left the house, they began to visit Lakshmi again and to see to her needs. Lakshmi's father and brothers wanted her to separate from Upul by applying for a divorce. On one occasion when Upul hit Lakshmi and hurt her arm causing her to stay in the hospital for two days, her elder brother, Ajith *aiyā*, insisted that she make a domestic violence complaint to the police. Ajith said that he would help her to look after the children if she separated from Upul. Her second elder brother Nihal visited her with food rations every weekend. When he went on trips, he would always take Lakshmi and the children with him. Lakshmi's father and brothers were willing to take her back and provide for her because they did not want her to be helpless. When Lakshmi's father had a heart attack and was admitted to the hospital, she said to me,

He is falling sick because of me. He thinks about what would happen to my children and me with Upul gone. This is why he falls sick. My *appachchi* is a god. I should hang a picture of him next to Buddha. Our *ammā* died when I was four years old, but he did not go after women he looked after us. I am suffering from the sorrows I gave *appachchi* when I eloped.

Lakshmi, though she depended on her father and brothers did not want to divorce Upul and go back to live with them. For her, this was a step back in life rather than forward and resembled similar concerns that Mihiri had also been expressed about becoming a divorcee and having to go home. Indeed, Lakshmi was beginning to enjoy her independence: 'living like this is free (*nidahas*). I cook when I like and eat what I like. I have my children. I get money from Upul. I do not need to go and spend hours working

in the shop. I can stay in the house. It is jolly'. Lakshmi feels free from the male control that women generally feel in domestic spaces. After marriage, she had to submit to the authority of her husband. Living with her father and siblings she would have to submit to their authority. Living on her own in the house was 'freedom' for her. Nonetheless, Lakshmi's decision created tension between her and her father and brothers. For them, Lakshmi's 'freedom' meant that she had 'no protection' (*araksavak nā*). They told her that she was stubborn, like always, and was causing suffering to herself, her children and to them. This made matters worse as she felt misunderstood by her kin. They too, it seemed, were pushing Lakshmi back into a position of subjugation where she needed to depend upon and be protected by a male. However, consequences of being without 'protection', became evident when other men began to harass her.

With Upul's affair becoming a public spectacle Lakshmi also began to get anonymous calls from various men. Lakshmi said 'such dogs, they ask me if I am lonely and if they can come to see me? This is all because of that man (Upul). He might even be behind these calls, getting men to call me to give me a bad name'. One day when I went to visit Lakshmi, I found her shaking and crying; she explained:

That man Nishānta came into my house drunk. I was in the room, and he was here inside my house drunk! He could not even stand properly he said he came to ask me if I could loan him 50,000 rupees (GBP 250). I ran out of the house. I was glad Sumudu was not home. This stupid boy (Kavidu) was nicely sleeping in the room. He would not even know if someone killed me. This is when I get so angry with that man (Upul). He is giving protection to other women and children!

Nishānta had left the house as Lakshmi ran out of the house. He had breached the etiquette of visiting by entering a house when the woman was alone and when he was drunk. Lakshmi said that he is known to have a bad character, so she felt that he is capable of harassing her. Having no grown-up male in the house left her in a vulnerable situation. When the incident with Nishanta was the subject of rumour and gossip people said: 'this is what happens when a woman has no protection from a man'. A woman, therefore, cannot be free from male authority; she has to be either under a father, a brother, a

husband or a son. The willingness of all to see 'protection' as a patriarchal conceptualisation indicated to me that even women think in these terms.

Lakshmi's neighbours and close friends Mādhavi and Premalatā had been there giving support from the beginning of her dispute with Upul. They would visit her often and discuss her problems and offer her advice and consolation. Premalatā pointed out to me that: 'at least by talking to us and laughing for a bit, her suffering will be lessened'. When Upul hit Lakshmi and she was hospitalised it was Mādhavi who took care of Lakshmi's children. Before Lakshmi left for the court cases, she would worship Premalatā and ask for her blessings. They would even spend the night in Lakshmi's house when she felt insecure because men like Nishānta may try to enter. More than her kin or affines it was those who were kin-like (*nadāyo vage*) that understood her predicament and helped her. However, gossip and rumour in the village disrupted the good relations between Lakshmi and her kin-like.

One day, Lakshmi learnt that Mādhavi and Premalatā were spreading rumours about her and speaking in favour of Upul in public. Mādhavi had advised Lakshmi not to dress well, wear gold jewellery or ride her scooter because villagers were gossiping that she was becoming a 'bad woman' (*naraka ganiyek*). A bad woman is seen as a woman who arouses suspicion of sexual activity outside of marriage. Later, Lakshmi was informed by a few other women in the village that it was actually Mādhavi who had said that Lakshmi was a bad woman. As a result, Lakshmi began to distance herself from Mādhavi and Premalatā. Their visits to each other's houses also stopped. When I visited Mādhavi, she explained the misunderstanding between her and Lakshmi saying, 'she is angry with me because Upul *aiyā* gave me a lift in the van'. Premalatā who was also there explained to me how Lakshmi scolded her for spreading rumours about Upul's affair in the village. Premalatā said, 'She thought I told Vimalā and scolded me. Everyone knew, though she was hiding the problem'. The nature of gossip is like the proverbial Chinese whispers. Miscommunication and layers of interpretation are added as rumours spread around the village. In Divulvæva, those who are the subject of gossip hear the rumours, they instantly believe it to have originated from those who are close to them. As Lakshmi put it 'I only said everything to Premalatā *nanda* and Mādhavi, if not from them, who else would know such details that are spread in the village?'

The involvement of affines, kin, and close friends in Lakshmi's disputes illustrates how the social hierarchies are reproduced to subjugate the woman further. They demonstrate a patriarchal ideology in which a woman has no capacity to live independent of a man. As a result, relatives advising Lakshmi to hold onto the marriage or to let go of the marriage both had the same effects, that is, to reproduce a gendered social hierarchy. In other words, the response by affines, kin, and close friends paint Lakshmi in the role of a victim whose suffering is ultimately her own fault. She had stepped outside a normative frame in which it is assumed that a wife will be inclined to be caring and nurturing while the husband will be a provider and protector (Yalman, 1967; Sirisena, 2018). Such changes in domestic roles are part of a wider pattern of social change that has occurred in recent times. These changes in themselves become reasons for disputes and violence causing abuse within the house (Gamburd, 2000; Widger, 2015b). As I have illustrated, however, although Lakshmi is made vulnerable and further subjugated in the social hierarchies, she was still able to manage her everyday life. She navigated the relationships with her affines, kin and close friends to fill the vacuum made by the absence of a provider. For instance, she found consolation in knowing that her affines were on her side. Also by disowning Upul, her father and brothers supported her financially and emotionally by looking into the needs of the house. Her close friends brought her laughter and support by sleeping in her house and looking after her children. In this manner, within the subjugation, Lakshmi found ways to confront her affliction with the help of those with whom she had *badim*. However, these same relationships could not enable her to operate outside of the conventional role of a caregiver.

### **Involving the State**

When Lakshmi went to report that Upul had eloped with Rasika, she told me how the police had said, 'any person over the age of 18 has the right to go with and cohabit with anyone they want. So, we cannot do anything. You can file for divorce if you like'. Lakshmi went on,

I told them that he is my husband, isn't there any power for a marriage certificate? Is it legal in this country for a man to leave his wife and children and live with another woman? If a woman did the same would you just say the same?

The police officer's response was that 'if they are over 18 we cannot do anything. It is a problem with the way they were brought up not about the law of the country'. Lakshmi was quite frustrated by the policeman's response. She told me,

What's the use of having a police force if they cannot do anything? I shouted at the police there. I told them that I would behave in the same way in public and none of them should come to stop me. If a man leaving his wife and children to go dancing with another woman is not punishable, I can do it too.

She said that she cursed the police and the Officer in Charge for not practising the law, as she thought it should be exercised.

Furthermore, Lakshmi said that the policemen and women at the police station made her feel more helpless by blaming her for her marital problems. As she explained:

Kamani the policewoman who also lives in this village told me 'if he left you after 16 years together for a woman he got to know for two years, then there must be something wrong with you too'. And another policeman said, 'why were you so lenient?' When we go to the police seeking justice, they make us more helpless.

Kamani was intimating that Lakshmi's inability to sexually satisfy Upul made him leave her for another woman. The policeman was also suggesting that Lakshmi failed to keep Upul with her, not that he left. Such comments point to the woman's failure to uphold social expectations as a wife. The questions by the police officers suggested that Lakshmi could change the situation in her house by simply enduring the suffering as women are expected to. Despite establishing Women's and Children's Desks in police stations which are staffed by trained women police officers, the way that Lakshmi's complaint was handled would suggest that where domestic issues are concerned, little has changed (Gomez and Gomez, 2004). In Lakshmi's view, the police should have acted more responsibly in dealing with her complaint. Blaming Upul's behaviour on his upbringing and pointing to problems of sexual intimacy in their relationship indicated that the

domestic sphere is a private sphere and one that is mostly outside the law (Schneider, 1994). According to marriage law in Sri Lanka, adultery is a ground to dissolve the marriage in a court of law, alongside which sit other faults such as malicious desertion, impotence, and separation (Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1908). The woman is thus given a route to leave an abusive marriage, but the fact that she doesn't pursue this option indicates the strong social pressures in play against divorce.

Another confrontation with the police happened about a domestic violence incident between Lakshmi and Upul. The incident was narrated to me by Lakshmi. She said that one-afternoon Upul came into the house and attempted to take his 'exercise bicycle'. She said she was furious because he was taking things from the house to his rented house with Rasika. Lakshmi had shouted, 'why? are you taking this bicycle so that woman can use it?' She had taken Upul's vehicle keys and threatened to break the windows of the vehicle if he did not put the exercise bicycle back where it was. Then she had grabbed his gold chain and, Upul fearing that she would break the chain, had taken it off and given it to Lakshmi. She had said, 'I will not give the chain back till you give back the 45,000 rupees (GBP 225) you took from my bank account and the 50,000 rupees (GBP 250) you took from my *appachechi*'. By this time Mādhavi and a few other villagers had come to their house to see what was happening. Upul had looked at Mādhavi and implored saying, 'look Mādhavi she is not giving my chain, I did not come here to create problems'. Then Lakshmi had got furious and scolded Upul saying that he is a worthless father who cannot give money for his own children's education and needs. At this point, Upul had put back the exercise bicycle and left the house threatening to complain to the police about her stealing his gold chain. A few hours later Lakshmi had received a call from the police station requesting her to appear the following day to solve the dispute with Upul. Lakshmi had shouted at the policewoman who called her saying she will not come and for them to do anything they want. She explained to me,

This problem would not have gone this far if the police did their job properly. The police did not stop that woman (Rasika) in any way when I complained that Upul is having an affair with her. They did not do anything when I got hurt from his beating and was in the hospital for two days. Upul always tells me that he can make the police dance in his palm.

Meanwhile, Upul had been calling her and threatening her, saying that he would put her in jail if she did not give back his chain. Lakshmi had said ‘there is no difference in dying or living for me, you do what you can!’ (*mata ulath ekai pilath ekai puluvan deyak karanava!*). Upul had called their daughter Sumudu and said ‘tell your *ammā* to give my gold chain back, or you will lose the house’ Sumudu had said ‘but this is our house’ Upul had responded ‘no it is my house’.

The seriousness of the existential crisis that Lakshmi was experiencing was evident stating there was no difference for her between life and death. In attempting to take things from the house, Upul was separating things that they had developed together. Their marriage, their house, their social network, their wealth was ruptured and rendered uncertain. In legal terms, Upul owned all their wealth and property so he believed that he could use this to inflict more suffering on Lakshmi by claiming things as his, such as the house itself. Women like Lakshmi who elope at young ages have no other investments that would sustain their lives outside of marriage and family life. In such circumstances, she has no return on the time and energy she has invested in building married life. This gives a compelling reason as to why women tolerate suffering in households rather than attempting to separate. It also explains why Lakshmi’s behaviour is considered a transgression, not only in her community but also by the state.

After all this commotion, Lakshmi went to the police station the next day with her father. She said she dressed as nicely as possible to show Upul that she is not affected by his actions. He had got angry when he saw her and had hit her at the police station itself. He had kicked her, which led her to fall back onto the ground. Lakshmi said,

The police shouted at Upul and restrained him. They said that his actions show that he has no respect for the police. I told them now do you have enough evidence to see what kind of a man he is? Then they arrested him and filed a complaint about assaulting me.

Lakshmi laughed and said ‘he wanted to put me in the jail and he ended up in jail. Nothing good will come to him. He will live like a dog’ (*māva kudu karanna gihin ūva kuduvata dammā. Ōkata hodak venne na. Ballek vage inna venne*). Upul had pleaded with the police to let him go, but the police had not listened to him but said that he would be jailed and appear in

court the next day. Lakshmi had said to the police, ‘I have no shame-fear anymore. I am not the innocent woman I used to be because of him; I have been struggling in police stations and courts’ (*mata dan lajja baya kiyala ekak na. Mu nisa mama polici usavi gane rasthiyadu vela dan mama issara bitiya ahinsaka gani neme*). The police had comforted her and said that they would press charges under the Domestic Violence Act. Lakshmi said, ‘I have no sympathy for him any more. Last time when I was in the hospital after he beat me, I withdrew my complaint because I felt sorry for him. Now I do not care.’ However, later in the day, Lakshmi got to know that the police had let Upul go after she left the station. As Lakshmi complained to me, ‘this is the justice of the police, they saw him assault me, and it was inside the police station. But still, they set him free probably because he got them a bottle of arrack or *kassippu* (illicit liquor). They will change the law for money or arrack.’ When her brother Nihal phoned the police to inquire about it, they had said that the case had been referred to the Mediation Board (*Samatha Mandalaya*).<sup>15</sup>

Where domestic violence is concerned, cultural narratives are reproduced which prevent women from seeking relief from the state’s legal system (Kodikara, 2012, 2015). Cultural idioms such as ‘only until the rice is cooked’ or ‘home fires must be kept confined to the home’ are used not only by the lay community but also by state officials (Kodikara, 2012, 2015). Recording the parliamentary debate for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act, Kodikara claims that even women parliamentarians were opposing the state’s involvement in domestic disputes as it is understood to be a private sphere governed by cultural values (Kodikara, 2012). The incident at the police station shows that even after the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act cultural narratives prevent its implementation. The police, it would seem, are more concerned about losing respect for their authority than the harm and disrespect caused to the women who bring domestic violence cases. The fact that such cultural narratives inform policymaking and state laws suggests a ‘looping effect’ in the discourse of domestic violence in society which leads women to internalise the violence they experience as justifiable and legitimate (Hacking, 1995). As evident in Lakshmi’s attempt to report domestic violence, the state failed to understand the public nature of private violence. As I have illustrated, domestic violence in Sri Lanka is not hidden and secretive as Gomez and Gomez seem to suggest when they try to explain the state’s failure to act against it (Gomez and Gomez, 2004). What is

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<sup>15</sup> The Mediation Board Act No 72 of 1988 established Mediation Boards in the island to resolve disputes informally, quickly, and inexpensively.



hidden, however, is this patriarchal loop which reproduces cultural narratives which legitimate violence towards women. This looping effect is further highlighted with the intervention of the Mediation Board to resolve Lakshmi's and Upul's dispute.

Lakshmi, accompanied by her father, was summoned to appear at the Mediation Board to resolve her dispute with Upul. The Mediation Boards are housed in local government schools and work during weekends. They are presided over by lay people such as retired government servants. There are teams of three people sitting at tables to meet with disputants. The Board has jurisdiction to settle disputes of domestic violence but are not able to punish (Gomez and Gomez, 2004). Lakshmi described how, at the meeting, Upul had politely pulled a chair for her to sit on. However, she had refused and sat in a different chair a bit further from him. For Lakshmi, his gesture indicated an apology that she was not willing to receive. Then after listening to the complaint, the mediators had asked if he had taken another woman with three children. Upul had said 'yes'. Then the three mediators had scolded him for assaulting Lakshmi. They had told him that he had no right to hit her even if she was his legal wife. He had listened to everything without saying a word. The mediators had justified Lakshmi's actions by saying that it is acceptable that she got angry when he came to the house to take belongings. They had said 'wouldn't she get mad when you come to take the things in the house after everything you had done? Your children also live there, don't they? Let the children use the stuff'. In defence of his actions Upul had said 'she failed to keep me with her' (*mava ræka ganna meyata bari unā*) to the mediators. To this Lakshmi's father had said 'as if he is a baby to protect and keep safe' (*rækaganna bābā nē*). Lakshmi had also been furious; she had said 'I forgave him and took him back to the house three times, and still he did not change.' Then the mediators had told Upul that Lakshmi had done enough to keep the family together and that it was his fault. They had banned him from coming to the house and had said,

You should look at this matter as a human (*manussayek vage*), don't base your actions on what is decided by law, think of your children and give them money to live rather than the exact amount the court suggested. You will have to go back to this woman one day, but then even your children will not look after you, they will spit on your face!

Upul had agreed but said to the mediators to tell Lakshmi that in return she should not bother him. Lakshmi had asked ‘what do you mean? Do I come to your shop and shout or hit you? Do I ask for more money? I take whatever you give me and do not bother you at all.’ At the end of the meeting, Upul had to sign a document saying that he would not abuse Lakshmi or come into the house again.

Mediation Boards’ function is to assist in the resolution of complex domestic disputes in which the victim does not wish to remove herself from the house (Gomez and Gomez, 2004). The informality of the Mediation Boards introduces a powerful cultural narrative about ‘keeping a family together’. The mediators use their status as respected government servants who are senior to those in the dispute to advise and even scold the parties. They use their authority to remind the disputants of their responsibilities to one another. In Lakshmi’s and Upul’s dispute, the main point they emphasised was to ‘think of the children’. Their advice to Upul to be more ‘human’ indicates that the parental responsibility to children is a high priority in the domestic sphere. Extramarital relationships are viewed by the Board as temporary and do not have the same value as a marital relationship. Therefore, the mediators’ position was essentially that Upul will have to go back and Lakshmi will have to accept him because they are married by law and have children to think of. In this sense, unless by a legal divorce, the marriage is expected to be intact and extramarital relationships are but temporary ruptures that can be healed with time. However, what the mediators fail to address is the suffering the woman has to undergo during any temporary rupture. By being a woman, she has a responsibility to maintain family life. It is to this responsibility that Upul alluded to when he claimed that Lakshmi had failed to ‘keep’ him. Lakshmi’s father’s remark about Upul being ‘a baby’ highlights Upul’s failure in his responsibilities as a husband.

The involvement of the courts, the police and the Mediation in Lakshmi and Upul’s dispute each illustrates the patriarchal bias in play when the state is brought in. This is possibly why women, in general, do not resort to the state for help to resolve domestic disputes. Women’s suffering thus remains, in Das’s terms, largely hidden (Das 2007). However, although hidden, the fact that Lakshmi took her problems to the police and the mediation board did provide her with some capacity to influence her situation even amidst affliction. She was able to communicate to Upul that she could live without depending on him and was able to bring evidence to the police of the abuse she was suffering.

Nonetheless, access to state mechanisms is inadequate to end her suffering. In the following section, I will explore how this suffering turns to anger.

## Angry Women

Lakshmi went to worship the *Jaya sbri mahā bodhiya* in Anuradhapura with her Nihal *aiya* and his family.<sup>16</sup> Whilst there they chanced to meet Upul and Rasika. Upon return she told me what happened: ‘I felt so angry when I saw them. How could such bad, immoral people come to worship such a purely religious site as the *sbri mahā bodhiya*? I was anyway waiting for a chance to hit that woman, and I got that chance’. Lakshmi had run towards Upul and Rasika and grabbed Rasika from her hair and slapped her across the face. Then Lakshmi said that she could not remember what she did, but she just hit Rasika. Lakshmi said she was also upset because Upul had given her only 10,000 rupees (GBP 50) as maintenance fees that month claiming that his business was doing badly and he had no money. When she saw him with Rasika, she said she got angry because it seemed that he had enough money to go around with Rasika but not enough to feed his children. Lakshmi said ‘I could not believe my strength, I hit Upul too, I tore his shirt. I got that woman’s wristwatch too. It fell off when I hit her. I shouted saying this woman has left her own three children and taken my man. Nobody came to stop me. I have to say thinking back it is very funny’. The police at the security post at the religious site had come over and asked what the matter was, and Upul and Rasika had walked away saying nothing. The police had asked Lakshmi to step into their office. Lakshmi said that they gave her a seat and asked her why she behaved that way. After listening to the whole story, they had advised her not to act like that in religious places. When I saw Lakshmi and listened to her relating the story she was elated. Everyone she told the story to commended her for her violent behaviour by saying ‘good work!’ (*honda vadel*). I realised that this incident marked a kind of catharsis for Lakshmi.

Ahmed suggests that the emotions lie beneath the faculties of thought and reason: they are reactive rather than active, dependant rather than autonomous (Ahmed, 2014, p. 3). Subordination of emotions is closely associated with the subordination of women who are represented as ‘close to nature, ruled by appetite and less able to transcend the body

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<sup>16</sup> The *Jaya sbri mahā bodhiya* is a Buddhist religious place in Anuradhapura. It is considered to be a plant from the right wing branch of the Sri Maha Bodi tree in India that is believed to be the place where Buddha attained enlightenment.

through thought, will and judgement' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 3). The emotion of anger is spoken by Ahmed as something destructive that can cause harm to the individual as well as to others and therefore is not desirable (Ahmed, 2014). However, for a Sinhala woman who is oppressed enactments of suffering mostly take the form of expressions of anger (*taraba, kenti*). Throughout this chapter, Lakshmi has displayed her anger by hitting and shouting. However, she was never condemned for her anger. Anger in women is socially legitimised and even accepted. Describing Tamil women, McGilvary states that they represent 'heat while men are considered to be 'cool' in Hindu cosmology (McGilvary, 1998). The red saris worn by Hindu brides with red forehead pigments (*kunkuma*) are said to be a representation of this female energy that is symbolic of a blazing fire (McGilvary, 1998). Such representations of Tamil women, associate them with what is hot and fierce and helps explain the expression of anger. These themes, as we will see, are echoed in the way that anger features in Lakshmi's response to her situation.

The expression of anger in Sri Lankan society is typically understood as an act of violence. Visible displays of anger in Sri Lanka are seen as the negation of shame (*lajja na*) and self-control (Spencer, 1990b). Suicide, homicide and the practice of sorcery have been examined as acts of violence rooted in anger (Spencer, 1990b; Widger, 2012, 2015b). Such interpretations are related to the movement of emotion from 'inside out' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9). A man would murder another man because the victim angered him or a woman would attempt suicide because her husband angered her. Spencer suggests that the projection of anger inward or outward depends on the level of intimacy between the two (Spencer, 1990b). Those with a high level of intimacy are likely to be confronted with anger directed inwards, as in suicide, while those with low levels of intimacy would result in outward projections such as homicide or the practice of sorcery (Spencer, 1990b). This dichotomy reinforces a view of men as the ones capable of violence, while the woman in her soft disposition is non-violent, marking out men as perpetrators and woman as victims (Jaganathan, 2000). Women, for example, are said to be less involved in homicide because of their soft non-violent dispositions (Spencer, 1990b). Domestic violence is seen to fit these culturally appropriate understandings. Where women's anger is concerned, however, the example of Lakshmi points to different dynamics in play. What I discovered, in Divulvæva, was that the outward, public expression of anger by women appeared to be legitimate and accepted. Even the state authorities such as the police and Mediation Boards seemed to accept women's anger.

As Ahmed argues, the understanding of anger, causing violent behaviours in people, cannot be restricted to a projection of an ‘inside-out’ movement of emotion (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9). What Lakshmi’s expressions of anger throughout her dispute with Upul and Rasika show are that women are not as ‘soft’ in their disposition. They too are capable of violence just like men. The difference between male violence and female violence in Sri Lanka, I would argue, is to be found in the particular form that the ‘sociality of emotions’ takes (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9). For example, a frustrated drunken man beating a woman because of his helplessness to provide for his family is an ‘inside-out’ movement of emotion. In such instances, the object of emotion is internal and projected out by abusing the wife or breaking things in the house. Such behaviour in men is considered culturally appropriate as violence is an acceptable trait of masculinity (Jaganathan, 2000). However, in Lakshmi’s case, violence is more of an ‘outside in’ movement. Her anger is caused by the behaviour of Rasika and Upul making the object of the emotion external. For this reason, no one attributed shame on Lakshmi for being angry or acting violently. In this sense, anger was a weapon of the weak; as Scott suggests, women use anger in their everyday life to resist oppression (Scott, 1985).

The display of anger which ‘comes from without and moves inward’ is made sense of by others as an emotional narrative (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9). In this narrative emotions are not seen to operate singularly but in conjunction with other emotional expressions such as love, grief, and hatred enabling the creation of a singular narrative (Ahmed, 2014). For instance, it was Lakshmi’s love for Upul and hatred for Rasika that made her angry. In the narrative which emotion leads to the other generates a sense of morality in the expression of anger. For instance, Lakshmi’s behaviour was not condemned but commended by others who saw it in person and heard of it afterwards. Upul and Rasika though being the victims of Lakshmi’s violence didn’t complain or retort but walked away. Spencer explains acts of suicide as ‘karmic entrapment’ of the other (Spencer, 1990a, p. 613). In the incident I describe here, it is Upul and Rasika who are morally entrapped – not by suicide but by violence. Lakshmi’s actions highlighted the immorality of Upul and Rasika’s behaviour, shaming them publicly. Lakshmi was on the moral high ground because the suffering afflicted on her by Rasika and Upul caused her ‘righteous anger’. Similarly, the anger Lakshmi had when beating Kavidu for being stubborn was justified because it was to make him a good child. The anger that Upul’s mother displayed to Upul

and Rasika was because she wanted her son to change. The anger that Lakshmi expressed when beating Rasika and Upul was to save her marriage and family life. What these examples illustrate is that, a particularly Sinhalese sociality of emotion gives justification for the display of negative emotions such as anger. However, public demonstrations of anger do not bring women emancipation. Suffering continues to be an ‘unseen wound’ that is not entirely comprehended by the public and, as we will see in the next chapter, one which requires other kinds of solution.

## **Concluding Reflections**

In this chapter, I have argued that the suffering of women in the home often goes unseen because it is part of her culturally expected responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Though the state has attempted to address women’s difficulties in the domestic sphere, for example in the Domestic Violence Act, in practice the state institutions still reproduce the same cultural narratives compelling women to hold on to marriages and hope for men to change their behaviour. Further, the afflictions that women face in the domestic space are considered to be temporary and impermanent ruptures that will mend in time. However, the woman’s capacity even amidst affliction is illustrated in her attempts to navigate through her relationships with her children, affines, kin, close friends and the state to mend the ruptures and her suffering. In this undertaking women express their suffering in the form of outbursts of anger, reflecting her helplessness that she is unable to comprehend. Such outbursts of anger is seen legitimate by the public as it arises from the particular ‘sociality of emotions’ that operates in this context (Ahmed, 2014).

## Chapter 6

### Cooling of the House: Therapeutic Healing in Everyday Life

One evening, I was conversing with Lakshmi in her garden sitting on the bench under a mango tree. In the course of our conversation she began to explain to me how the fire in her house began to burn her body:

I was crying and drifting to sleep all the time. I did not know whether the children ate or went to school, I just couldn't get out of bed. Then, I started to feel as if my whole body was on fire. I could not stay inside the house; I felt as if I was burning and I would scream for the children to throw water at me because I am on fire. They would bring water and throw at me. I realised that woman (Rasika) had done something to me to make me leave the house. I started becoming ill every day.

When I asked her what she thought Rasika had done to her, she said 'sorcery' (*gurukamak*). Lakshmi explained to me that one day when she could not bear the sensation of burning in her body, she went outside and stood under the outdoor shower with all her clothes on, crying. Her children had called Lakshmi's father to come when they saw their mother under the shower refusing to come into the house.

Lakshmi's father had cut limes (*dehi kapuva*) on her forehead to settle her.<sup>17</sup> Lakshmi said that she felt better after 'cutting limes' but not completely herself. Her family had also believed that Lakshmi was suffering from sorcery done by Rasika. They had decided that counter-sorcery had to be performed to heal her. Lakshmi's brother Nihal had taken her to a *maniyo* (a female ritual specialist) in Matale (a town 96km away from the village in Kandy district) to do treatment (*sābtuva*) for Lakshmi. Premalatā and Mādhavi had also accompanied Lakshmi to support her. Lakshmi said that the shrine (*devalē*) that they went to was dedicated to a demon goddess named Rōdamani. Lakshmi explained to me what happened at the shrine:

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<sup>17</sup> Limes are considered to have cooling properties that can reduce the heat of the body. The fruit is used to do sorcery or to relieve a person from sorcery. The limes have to be picked from a tree in a specific manner at a certain time of day depending on the reason for plucking. Then limes are washed in water with turmeric to cleanse the limes and chanted to with powerful words bringing energy into the limes. Afterwards, the lime is cut with an arecanut cutter (*giraya*) while chanting.

*Maniyo* first listened to my problem and then went into a trance (*māyam*) and explained to the goddess (*deviyo*) my suffering (*duka*) in verse. I collapsed when she went into a trance. Upul's dead father had possessed me. *Maniyo* had then spoken like Upul's father in her trance. I had been shaking violently, I had eaten lime and torn Premalatā *nānda's* blouse as well. I cannot remember any of that. Upul's father had asked for food that he liked when he was alive and clothes to leave me alone. He had asked for cassava, chicken, red rice, clothes and his walking stick. He had left my body then as we had promised to come back in a week with his request. Then the *maniyo* had tied a string (*ārakshā nūla*) on my wrist, see this one (she showed me a red and green string on her wrist), and we tied a *padura* vowing to come back with a *pujava* and the requests of Upul's father in a week's time.<sup>18,19</sup> After we went again with all that Upul's father demanded and offerings, *maniyo* went into a trance, and Upul's father spoke through her, we could not find his walking stick as Upul's mother had burnt it. He asked us 'that woman had burnt my walking stick hasn't she?' But he accepted everything we gave and promised to leave me alone. After that day I became well again.

Lakshmi's experience with sorcery shows a different strategy for dealing with unseen wounds. Here supernatural forces are manipulated to harm others as well as to provide relief. As I have argued in chapter five, the sensation of burning is an embodiment of Lakshmi's suffering. The description of the 'causes' and 'treatments' for this sensation is rooted in sorcery. In this chapter, I will first explore the practice of sorcery in Sri Lanka contextualising Lakshmi's experience as outlined above. Then I will describe the supernatural forces, the ritual specialists and the household problems that people attempt to be solved by means of sorcery in Divulvāva. Finally, I will give a detailed account of how Lakshmi practised sorcery against Rasika and Upul and how she managed to 'cool down' her house that had 'caught fire'. I will illustrate how sorcery is used by people to overcome everyday problems. Before exploring sorcery in Divulvāva, I will discuss the

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<sup>18</sup> A *padura* is a coin tied in a cloth to symbolise the vow made.

<sup>19</sup> A *pujava*, usually consists of cut or whole fruits arranged in a platter with betel leaves at the base. Money is also placed on the platter.



literature of the supernatural in Sri Lanka to highlight how practices of sorcery can be understood.

## **The Practice of Sorcery in Sri Lanka**

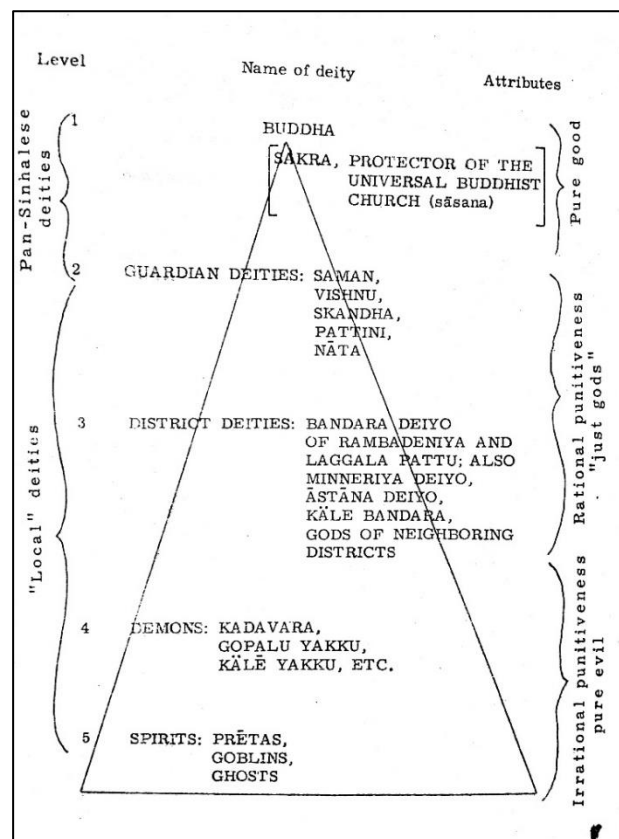
The discussion of sorcery in Sri Lanka has been situated within discourses about religion and ritual (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988; Stirrat, 1992; Kapferer, 1997). Sorcery is practised in religious places belonging to all religions on the island, by ritual specialists identified with different religions, for clients from all religions. The practice of sorcery in everyday life, has been explained in terms of ‘pantheons’ or power hierarchies of supernatural agents that interact with humans (Obeyesekere, 1963b, 1966; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). It is also explained in terms of ‘cults’ that incorporate supernatural agents into the pantheon (Obeyesekere, 1977, 1984; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988; Kapferer, 1997). Investigations into exorcisms (*tovil*), most popular in the South of the island, have also contributed to the understanding of sorcery regarding ‘healing rituals’ to counter sorcery (Kapferer, 1979c, 1979b, 1979a, 1983). In describing exorcisms, the ritual specialists who have the knowledge and skill to perform the rituals have also contributed to the understanding of sorcery (Simpson, 1997; Vogt, 1999). To practice sorcery, these ritual specialists have warrants (*varama*) from Buddha, gods and demons. The life experiences of ritual specialists and its link with sorcery is studied in works such as Obeyesekere’s *Medusa’s Hair* (Obeyesekere, 1981). The victims of sorcery too, have gained significance, especially in the light of possession narratives (Kapferer, 1979c, 1979b, 1983, 1997; Stirrat, 1992). The exploration into supernatural dealings in Sinhala culture indicates the significance given to ‘unseen forces’ in everyday life. I will limit the discussion of previous literature to three general themes: the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon, understandings of demons and gods, and clients and victims of sorcery.

### *The Sinhala Buddhist Pantheon*

The practice of sorcery needs to be understood in the context of the Sinhala Buddhist Pantheon (Obeyesekere, 1963b, 1966). The structure of the pantheon is hierarchically constituted with the Buddha at the top, then the gods, the demons, and an array of lesser supernatural beings (Obeyesekere, 1963b). When performing a ritual to a particular supernatural agent, ‘permission’ (*avasara*) is sought from those above the deity

(Obeyesekere, 1963b). Even offerings to each supernatural agent are different according to their status in the pantheon (Obeyesekere, 1963b). For instance, Buddha and the gods are given vegetarian foods and auspicious flowers while demons and lesser beings are offered flowers that are considered as inauspicious and burnt meat, fish or eggs (Obeyesekere, 1963b). Therefore, the practices of ritual and worship to the supernatural agents is determined by their position in the pantheon. A simplified diagram of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon drawn by Obeyesekere is illustrated in figure 13 below (Obeyesekere, 1966).

*Figure 13 Obeyesekere's Simplified Diagram of the Sinhala Buddhist Pantheon*



The status in the hierarchy is also determined by the 'universal law of karma' (Obeyesekere, 1963b). The gods are of higher status because of their 'good karma' in previous births, whereas the demons and lesser beings are of low status because of accumulated 'bad karma' (Obeyesekere, 1963b). 'The pantheon also represents a morality structure with pure goodness and benevolence represented at the apex of the pantheon and pure evil at the base' (Obeyesekere, 1966). The position in the pantheon is also a reflection of power and authority; the Buddha holds supreme authority that is then

distributed to others below in the form of a 'warrant' (Obeyesekere, 1963b). In performances of exorcisms, Obeyesekere illustrates how Hindu supernatural agents are included in the pantheon by means of a decree from Buddha (Obeyesekere, 1963b). In this manner, foreign supernatural agents are localised into the Sinhala Buddhist cosmology giving them positions in the pantheon. The position of a supernatural agent in the pantheon indicates their degree of power, authority, karma and morality.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere argue that the inclusion of gods from the Hindu pantheon to the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon is linked to socio-economic changes in the country (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). As a result, the significance given to the four 'guardian deities' of the pantheon has changed over the years (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). For instance, The Hindu deity, Murugan, locally known as Katharagama has risen to prominence overpowering the other gods in the pantheon (Obeyesekere, 1978; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). Moreover, Hindu deities such as Ganesh, Sarasvati, Shiva, and Lakshmi have joined the ranks as 'gods' in the pantheon and have become increasingly popular among the clientele of the supernatural (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). The Sinhala Buddhist pantheon has expanded with the inclusion of new gods. Moreover, the position of demons in this new pantheon has changed too. Some demons, such as Suniyam and Kāli have come to be interpreted as having god-like dispositions (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988; Kapferer, 1997). Kapferer explains that Kāli is linked with Suniyam as his consort (Kapferer, 1997). Suniyam and Kāli are considered as the authorities in the practice of sorcery in Sri Lanka (Kapferer, 1997). However, their characteristics as demon and god displace them in the hierarchy. Therefore, the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon is a fluid structure that can change shape according to social change giving significance to various supernatural agents while the apex remains untouched and unchanged.

### *Demons and Gods*

The demons (*yakku*) in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon are believed to be able to interact with humans. According to Sinhala myths about demons, they were banished by Buddha to a world of their own (*yaksha lokaya*) under the rule of Vesamuni who is said to be the king of demons (Kapferer, 1979a). Confined to this world, the demons can only afflict a human by their gaze (*dishtiya*) (Kapferer, 1979a). On par with their lowly position in the

pantheon, demons are said to be the embodiments of desire, passions, and emotions such as lust, pride, greed, cruelty, anger, violence, pain, and sorrow that are caused by attachment to the world and therefore create suffering (Kapferer, 1979a, p. 155). Legend has it that the origin of a demon is related to the excessive display of emotions (Kapferer, 1979a). For instance, *Riri yaka*, expresses violence and anger by attacking people and biting their carotid arteries and sucking their blood (Kapferer, 1979a, p. 155). The place of demons in the pantheon is in contrast to that of the Buddha and the gods. It should be noted that the explanation of how demons come into existence is extended to explain how 'spirits' (*preteyo*) appear in the pantheon. They too are said to be those who could not detach from the world and therefore upon death transformed into 'spirits'. For instance, Upul's father was said to be a spirit (*preta*) because he had an excessive desire for sexual relations during his lifetime as a human. As a result, his family believed he is stuck as a spirit after death unable to move to a better birth.

The different dispositions of demons and gods become a problem when giving meaning to Suniyam and Kālī who are said to be both. Kapferer argues that the 'double aspect' of these supernatural agents distinguishes them from others making them 'beings of the centre' able to transform into either aspect (Kapferer, 1997). Their dual nature makes similar to people because they can do either good or evil. Kapferer alludes to this by linking supernatural beings to origin stories which tell of how they came from divine-human unions (Kapferer, 1997). Kapferer suggests that this hybridity gives these beings the ability to 'direct their consciousness actively and transformationally into the world, to make and unmake realities of themselves and of their fellows, to become intimate and influential in the action of others, and even, as it was, to become consubstantial with the very bodily beings of others' (Kapferer, 1997, p. 33). He draws on the popularity of the supernatural beings of the 'centre' to describe the character of 'state power' (Kapferer, 1997). However, in doing so, he overlooks the interaction between the supernatural and the users of sorcery which I am keen to describe here.

The connection between the supernatural and humans are expressed in exorcisms performed to 'cure' people of 'illnesses' (Kapferer, 1979b). It is said that the 'illness' is caused by demons misbalancing the three humours of wind (*vāta*), blood (*pīta*) and phlegm (*sema*) (Kapferer, 1979b, 1979a). Different demons are associated with different humours: the cemetery demon known as '*Mahason yaka*' is said to cause imbalance of the humour

of wind, the blood demon '*Riri yaka*' imbalances the humour of blood, and the disease demons '*Sanni*' imbalance the humour of phlegm (Kapferer, 1979b, 1979a). The imbalance is said to be caused by the attraction of the gaze of a demon or spirit causing the person to be mentally disturbed (Kapferer, 1979b). The cause of illness in this manner is a diagnosis of the ritual specialist who would then perform a healing ritual to 'cure' the person (Kapferer, 1979b). Some such healing rituals are '*Mabason samayama*', '*Iramudun samayama*', '*Rata yakuma*', '*Sanni yakuma*' (Obeyesekere, 1969; Kapferer, 1979a, 1979c, 1983). The 'cure' is said to be brought to effect by bringing together the person's logic of thought, expression of repressed emotion, and the relationship built between the audience and the participants during the ritual (Obeyesekere, 1969; Kapferer, 1979b). The identity of the person who is ill is said to transform into one of health after the performance of a healing ritual (Kapferer, 1979c). In this process 'aleness' (*tanikama*) is also diagnosed to be a reason for the 'illness' (Obeyesekere, 1969; Kapferer, 1979a, 1979b). Aleness in this context is understood not only as physical aleness but also psychological aleness (Obeyesekere, 1969; Kapferer, 1979a, 1979b). Therefore, Kapferer argues that the healing ritual 'cures' the person by changing the emotional and mental condition of the patient by ending the aleness (Kapferer, 1979a, 1979b). The healing ritual in this sense is to construct a sense of belonging to the 'patient' by giving him or her attention and comic relief changing the 'patient's' mental attitude from negativity to positivity (Kapferer, 1979a, 1979b). In Divulvava, similar ideas about the role supernatural agent's play in illness and misfortune are present. These are drawn not only to heal oneself but also to hurt others by means of sorcery.

#### *Clients and Victims of Sorcery*

Obeyesekere defines sorcery as a 'technique of killing or harming someone, deliberately and intentionally, generally with homoeopathic or contagious magic, accompanied by spells, charms or incarnations' (Obeyesekere 1975, p.1). *huniyam* and *kodivina* are indigenous terms referring to acts of sorcery intended to bring disaster to others (Kapferer, 1997, pp. 36–37). Both use charmed objects to cause anguish, destruction, or hurt to another (Kapferer, 1997, p. 36). More specific types of sorcery practices include sending an animal to cause destruction to another (*pilluva*); reciting evil poems (*vas kav*); making a wax figure and sticking thorns in the five vital parts of the body (*katugasima*); burning a copper foil shaped like a human figure causing the victim to have a bad fever

(*patali giniam*); adding charmed drops of oil into food or the skin of a victim (*ina*); and throwing ash of a burned corpse onto someone's land (*bumipalu*) (Obeyesekere, 1975; Kapferer, 1997). These examples correspond to Obeyesekere's description of sorcery as 'rational crime' (Obeyesekere, 1975, p. 2).

In his account, Obeyesekere linked the appeal of sorcery with the collapse of traditional institutions to resolve disputes at village level and a deep distrust of state mechanisms such as the police to assist (Obeyesekere, 1975). The failure in local institutional mechanisms to give meaning to the 'wrong' that has been done and bring justice, gave sorcery space to emerge as an alternative way to obtain justice (Obeyesekere, 1975, p. 17). The practice of sorcery is said to be mostly about disputes over property and extramarital relationships of spouses (Selvadurai, 1973; Obeyesekere, 1975). This observation is useful in the context of Divulvæva where marital and property disputes are common and people have little faith that redress can be obtained from state institutions.

Before going on to discuss Lakshmi's encounter with sorcery it is important to consider the relationship between sorcery and possession. Throughout the literature on possession it is women who are most commonly afflicted (Obeyesekere, 1981; Kapferer, 1983; Stirrat, 1992). Obeyesekere explains possession in women as an expression of repressed emotions including sexual desire (Obeyesekere, 1981). Kapferer argues that the 'repression' of women in Sri Lankan society is linked with a 'cultural typification' that links women with pollution (*killi*) (Kapferer, 1983, p. 100). The cultural understanding of women as pollutants because of menstruation, childbirth and their involvement inside funeral houses, makes them more vulnerable to attack by demons (Kapferer, 1983). Furthermore, women and demons are said to share personality traits because both are more prone to 'emotional disturbance and excess, attachment to persons and relationships born of this world, as being more engaged in the pursuit of worldly desires, and as being mentally weak and more prone to worldly temptation' (Kapferer, 1983, p. 100). He explains that in the Sinhala Buddhist context, women's position as 'a passageway between nature and culture' makes them structurally 'weak and vulnerable to disorder' (Kapferer, 1983, p. 105). Stirrat extends this argument by referring to the Catholic belief in the original sin committed by Eve in the garden of Eden (Stirrat, 1992). He claims that Adam's failure to keep Eve away from temptation and then to give in to her temptation himself signals that 'uncontrolled

women are even more likely to be subject to a demonic attack' (Stirrat, 1992, p. 111). In this sense, demonic possession in women is a result of social subjugation.

Moreover, this literature points to demonic possession as a way of expressing behaviours that are culturally restricted to women. In a context in which women's sexuality is repressed and thought to need control by men, possession allows them to be expressive of their sexuality reasoning that it is not her but the demon's actions at work (Obeyesekere, 1981; Stirrat, 1992). Kapferer's explanation of the healing ritual '*ratayakuma*' that is performed for women afflicted by the black demon (*kalu kumaraya/ kalu yaka*) links with female sexuality (Kapferer, 2000).<sup>20</sup> Women who are sexually frustrated are said to be possessed by the black demon. Hence, a black demon signifies the sexual aloneness of women. However, Stirrat argues that by diagnosing a person to be possessed, the authority of parents over children or men over women is reinstated rather than challenged (Stirrat, 1992). The strong reinstate their power by convincing the weak that they are possessed and in need of correction (Stirrat, 1992). Nabokov extends this argument to Tamil women in South India. She argues that the control over marital sexuality is the core of Tamil demonic possessions in South Indian women (Nabokov, 1997, p. 299). She shows that the healing rituals of demonic possession are spaces for women to confess their marital disappointments, and yet convince them to return to the marriage and become the 'good wife' as is culturally expected (Nabokov, 1997). Therefore, the indication of possession that is linked to the practice of sorcery is a power play between the various social relations in society subjugating the woman to their socially expected roles. In the vignette with which I started this chapter, sorcery was used to cause possession and being possessed aroused suspicions of sorcery.

### *Lakshmi's Encounter*

For Lakshmi, Upul's extramarital relationship and threats to oust from the house left her feeling very vulnerable and alone. In Sinhala culture, 'aloneness' (*tanikama*) is a bad state which might cause one to behave 'unusually'. Lakshmi's family believed that in this state that sorcery had been practised and as a result she had become possessed. Indeed,

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<sup>20</sup> The origin of the black demon is linked to his death as a human prince at the hands of lustful women (Kapferer, 2000). In vengeance, in his birth as the black demon he lusted after women and is said to have devoured their young children (Kapferer, 2000). The diagnosis of a woman's possession as caused by the gaze of the black demon indicates her sexuality to be unfulfilled and hence the attraction of the black demon.

Lakshmi was told by a ritual specialist (*maniyo*) that she was possessed by the spirit of her father in law.

There are various ways in which sorcery might be countered. For example, her father practiced ‘cutting of limes’ (*dehi kaepima*). A more powerful ‘cutting’ was performed by the ritual specialist who diagnosed that Lakshmi was tied to her dead father in law’s spirit (*pereta bandanaya*). The warrant from the demon-goddess Rōdamani helped Lakshmi to undo the sorcery by negotiating gifts with the spirit. The healing ritual that she underwent changed her mental attitude from negativity to positivity. Lakshmi explained her change in mental attitude as follows:

I was such an innocent (*ahinsaka*) woman, but I cannot be innocent anymore. All these things happened to me because I was innocent. I did not even have the confidence to go to Anuradhapura on a bus alone. My life was about this house, Upul and my children. Look what happened to me? I will never be innocent hereafter.

The shift Lakshmi experienced made her a stronger and more confident woman in comparison to her former naïve and innocent self. The string the ritual specialist gave her served as ‘protection’ (*arakshāvak*) for her. The object serves to help Lakshmi to remember that she is not alone and powerful unseen forces are protecting her. The assurance she gained from the healing rituals changed her mental attitude. However, what I also discovered was that sorcery was also used to restore ‘good family life’. In the following section, I will explore how this was achieved in Divulvæva.

## **Sorcery in Divulvæva**

### *Kadavara Deijo*

In Divulvæva, more than any of the demons or gods spoken of so far, a demon-god named Kadavara was the most popular for all aspects of sorcery. He is said to be the protector of land and water in the area. The farmers hold milk-boiling ceremonies (*kiri ithirime mangalyaya*) in his honour before and after every harvest to obtain his blessings for their



cultivation.<sup>21</sup> When there was less rain for crops in the *yala* season in 2016, even the MDP advised farmers to hold ceremonies to Kadavara at his main shrine in the bund of Kalavæva to bring rain. Figure 14 below is a photograph of this shrine.

*Figure 14 The Kadavara Shrine at the Kalavæva Bund*



Though he is a demon, the villagers refer to him as a god (*deviyo*) or a father (*appachchi*). Kadavara had the ‘double aspect’ of being a demon and a god with the power and authority to help the livelihoods of the people in the area and solve their problems. Some said that there are seven avatars of Kadavara and others said that there were twenty-one. The avatars of Kadavara are positioned in the Sinhala pantheon under Vesamuni - the king of demons. They are said to serve the greater gods (*mabathma devivaru*): Saman, Vishnu, Kataragama and Nāta. I was told that the Kadavara need to help mortals to end their demonic lives. It is for this reason that they choose people to trance into and make them mediums to help others. The villagers perform a ritual called *bathmālāva* every year for Kadavara. It is a feast that the villagers prepare and after offering to Kadavara share among themselves. One such feast is said to bind the Kadavara to work for them for an aeon (*kalpayak*). In that sense, Kadavara will never be free from his demon life.

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<sup>21</sup> Milk boiling ceremonies are a post-harvest ritual performed by farmers to the local gods giving thanks for a successful harvest and asking for blessings for the next season. The farmers will cook milk rice with rice from the new harvest and sweet meats to offer to the gods and then share them among each other. I was told that in the past this ritual took place in the paddy fields (*yāya*) and was performed in solidarity with all the farmers who work one paddy field. In recent times, as I found during fieldwork, the ritual is performed in ritual spaces like the Kadavara shrine or in the houses of the farmers with their families.

I was told that there are many stories about the origin of Kadavara. The most popular was the one that linked Kadavara with the local history of the area. The legend to me legitimised his power and authority in the region and gave the people a relationship with him. The story was related to me as follows,

It is said that once there was a wild man in the forest. When people saw him, he would run away. Hearing of this man, King Dhatusena asked his army to capture him. The army captured him and brought him to the royal court. When the king questioned him, they realised that he was unable to speak. The king then sent word around the kingdom asking for anyone who can make this man speak to come forward. An elderly woman had come forward and taken the wild man to her house promising to make him speak. It is said that she gave him food with a lot of pepper to make him speak. This remedy worked, and the wild man began to speak. He was brought to the royal courts again and had a conversation with the king. The wild man told the king that he was a villager living in his kingdom. He had owned a very good bull that was loaned to others to take to Puttalam to bring salt.<sup>22</sup> One day his wife had scolded him saying that he should try to travel to Puttalam with the bull and bring salt to sell himself rather than loaning the bull to others. As a result, he had harnessed the bull to the cart and decided to head to Puttalam. Though he had no clue of the way to Puttalam, he assumed that the bull would know as it had been there before. But the bull had taken him around the village and brought him back home. His wife had been furious when she got to know this and scolded him and hit him with a cooking pot. Because of the shame generated by this, he had left the house and gone into the wilderness. He had not come home since then because he was embarrassed. After listening to his story, the king had asked him what the most beautiful view he had seen when he was in the forest was. The man had said that he had seen a natural pond that never dried up with many vines (*kalā vāl*) amidst the forest where elephants come to drink water. The king then had wanted the man to take him to this pond. Once the king saw the pond he had

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<sup>22</sup> Puttalam is a town on the North Western coast of Sri Lanka known for the production of salt. Traders from inland parts of the island, such the NCP, would have traveled to Puttalam to obtain salt to sell.

commissioned to build a tank there to harness water for the use of his kingdom. When the tank was completed, the wild man was given a plot of paddy from the best land close to the tank as a token of gratitude. He was entrusted with the duty of checking the water level of the tank to open and close the sluice gates. On the day of the tank opening, the priests were asked to chant *pirith* at the tank bund.<sup>23</sup> One blind priest accidentally broke the gadget that was installed to measure the level of water in the tank (*jala pālākaya*). As a result, the wild man did not realise the water level rising in the tank until the bund broke. The moment he saw the cracks in the bund he tried to hold the bund together with his bare hands. But he couldn't save the bund as it broke flooding the area and killing him. As he died trying to protect the tank, he became a demon and was entrusted to protect the people and the waters of this area. He was given the name Kadavara because he couldn't complete the duty he was entrusted with. *Kada* means broken and *vara* means the duty. Now he has to attain merit by helping people to end his life as a demon and to move to a better life. This is why there are *devalē* built for Kadavara, and we worship him. He helps us in our sufferings and in return obtains merit to ending his suffering as a demon.

The legend links Kadavara with the most revered king Dhatusena and the great feat Kalavæva that the king built. The main shrine of Kadavara is built facing the Kalavæva signifying the link mentioned in the legend. Kadavara's description as a protector of land and water in the area is signalled in the story as he was given the duty to protect the great tank that was to provide water for paddy cultivation in the area. The story further highlights the domestic trouble that he was subjected to. The shame caused by the wife led him to live in the forest without showing his face in public. His connection to human life with similar problems as his clientele indicates the worldly attachment that demons are said to have to restrict them to demonic lives. His human story indicates how men are affected by shaming and blaming by a woman and highlights the 'uselessness' of men as he could not even find his way to Puttalam which is not that far away from the NCP. However, his heroic act to save the tank and the failure of his duty indicates the ambivalent position that is given to him with aspects of both demon and god. I will detail

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<sup>23</sup> *Pirith* is a Buddhist practice of reciting verses and scriptures to ward off misfortune and danger.

the function of his power and authority with my experience when visiting his main shrine at the bund of Kalavæva later in the chapter. Next, I turn to Kāli who was another supernatural deity that the villagers sort help from for the problems in their everyday life.

### *Kāli Ammā*

A statue found during an archaeological excavation around the *Jētavana stupa* in Anuradhapura dates the worship of Kāli in NCP back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Bastin, 1996). Kāli's origins are recorded to be in Hindu mythology, and her popularity in South India is said to have paved the way for her presence in Sri Lanka (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). In Hinduism, she is said to be an avatar of Shiva's consort, Pārvati referred to as the 'mother goddess' positioned at the apex of the Hindu pantheon (Fuller, 1988). In her form as Pārvati she receives only vegetarian offerings, but in the deadly image of Kāli, she receives animal sacrifices (Fuller, 1988). She is also said to have appeared as Durga who fought a great battle to destroy the Buffalo demon (Mahisāsura) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). Kāli represents the energy and substance that gave form to the cosmos which is active and hot in contrast to the male principles of passivity and coolness (McGilvray, 1998). Hindu's refer to this duality as *Shiva-Sakti* symbolising the male god Shiva who sustains the world and his consort Sakti who provides the necessary divine energy for the world to function (McGilvray, 1998). The famous depiction of Kāli standing on Shiva with her tongue out, illustrated in figure 15 below, represents Kāli calmed from her fury when she realised that she was standing on her consort. The embarrassment created by this made her stick her tongue out (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). Gombrich and Obeyesekere explain that this image of Kāli and Shiva is an illustration of their sexual embrace; a more modest interpretation came into circulation later coinciding with changes to the original image (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988).

*Figure 15 A Picture of Kālī*



The duality of Kālī as a demon and a goddess was overlooked when she was incorporated into the Sinhala Buddhist Pantheon. Kālī is placed as a demoness under the rule of Pathini (Obeyesekere, 1984). Gombrich and Obeyesekere state that two Sinhala texts retrieved from the NCP in the 19<sup>th</sup> century record Kālī as a Buddhist deity who was present when Buddha attained enlightenment (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p. 138). Other texts and exorcisms on the island describe her as a ‘demoness of disease’ called ‘Vaduru Mā Dēvī’ whom Pathini quells (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p. 138). Her subordinate position to Pathini is interpreted as the attempt of the Pathini cult to downgrade Kālī so she would not compete with Pathini for a higher rank in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). The origin stories of Kālī on the island have attempted to tame her powers by conversion to Buddhism and situate her on a lower rank as a demoness ignoring her goddess nature explained in Hindu myth.

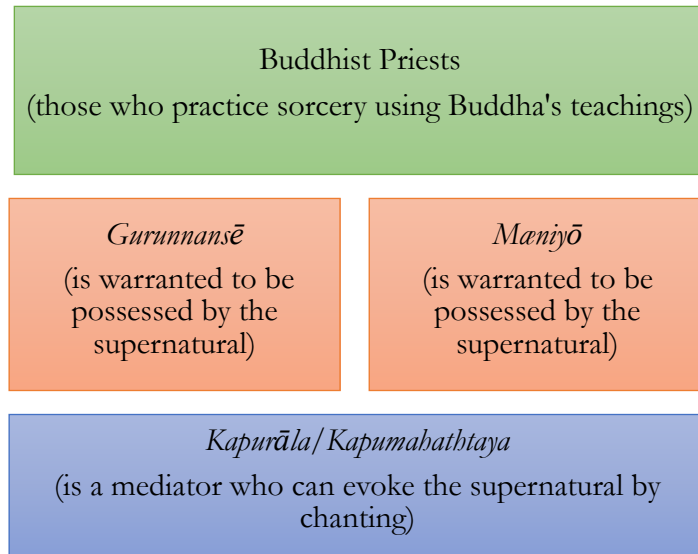
Bastin states that Kālī’s status has been elevated in the island as she has become more critical in relation to the practice of sorcery (Bastin, 1996). He further states that the Badrakālī temple at Munnesvaram on the northwest coast of the island is the most popular place of worship for the deity (Bastin, 1996). The temple is foremostly dedicated to Shiva with a separate temple for Kālī that is functioned by non-Brahman priests due to the pollution of animal sacrifices performed there (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). There are less Sinhala Buddhist shrines maintained for Kālī, but the Hindu shrines for her are

popular among the Sinhala Buddhists for practices of sorcery (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988; Bastin, 1996). The popularity of Kālī has risen her status to a goddess, and she is referred to as ‘mother’ (*Kālī Maniyo/ Kālī amma*) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). Her role as a ‘mother’ is linked to her popularity and is why she has gained a clientele who expect her to intervene in their everyday issues through sorcery (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988). True to the predictions of Gombrich and Obeyesekere, Kālī’s popularity has reached the villages of contemporary Sri Lanka where shrines dedicated to her are mushrooming in the personal spaces of ritual specialists as well as in Buddhist village temples (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p. 162). Next, I turn to describe of those who mediate between the clients and the supernatural in the village.

### *Sorcery and Ritual Specialists*

In Divulvæva, all practices of sorcery were called *gurukam* which can be deciphered as ‘the expert’s act’ indicating the importance given to the ritual specialist who has the skill and knowledge to practice sorcery. The ritual specialist is the intermediary connecting the human and the divine. Kapferer describes different types of ritual specialists in the practice of sorcery, 1) male traditional specialists (*adura*), 2) soothsayers (*sastarakāraya*), 3) male priestly intermediaries to sorcery gods at shrines (*kapurāla*) (Kapferer, 1997, p. 47). He further explains that astrologers, fortune tellers, village physicians, and Buddhist priests are involved in the practice of sorcery (Kapferer, 1997). He describes the different authorities of the three main ritual specialists in relation to his knowledge and personal experience (Kapferer, 1997). In my experience, the authority of the ritual specialist is interpreted in terms of his or her connection to the supernatural. For instance, Buddhist priests who practice sorcery (*veda hamuduruvo*) are considered to have higher authority because they derive their power to practice sorcery from the Buddha (*Buddha balaya*). Then, those who act as vehicles for the supernatural to trance into them and interact with the human world are considered second in authority. They are commonly referred to as *gurunnānse* for males and *maniyo* for females. Then the *kapurāla* who are also respectfully called *kapumabattaya* are the lowest who maintain shrines and assist a *gurunnānse* or a *maniyo*. They can evoke the supernatural by reciting poems and drumming. Therefore, as well as knowledge of sorcery, the warrant (*varama*) to practice sorcery is an indicator of authority. Figure 16 below illustrates the hierarchy of authority of ritual specialists in the area.

Figure 16 Hierarchy of Ritual Specialists



In the village, there was a ritual specialist to whom everyone referred to as ‘*gurunnānse*’. He said that he had a warrant from his family (*paramparava*) to practice sorcery. In this sense, he was categorically similar to Kapferer’s ‘male traditional specialist’ (*adura*) (Kapferer, 1997). The *gurunnānse* further said that the local demon god Kadavara trances into his body and uses him to help those who come to his shrine. He claimed that his dead mother is the bridge between him and the supernatural world that enables him to have the half-gaze (*ada baelma*) of the demon god. In this aspect, he is similar to the soothsayers (*sastharakaraya*) that Kapferer describes or the ecstatic priests and priestesses that Obeyesekere explains of (Obeyesekere, 1981; Kapferer, 1997). The village *gurunnānse* told me that he went with a senior ritual expert to the sacred *bo* tree in Anuradhapura the *Jaya shri mahā bōdhiya* to obtain permission to practice his warrant. His teacher, the senior ritual specialist, then taught him the art of sorcery and to control his possession of Kadavara. The senior ritual expert helped him to build a small shrine in his house to practice his warrant. The *gurunnānse* said,

I did not have much money to build a big shrine. It used to be like a small shed with tin sheets (*takaram*) for a roof. Then a devotee came to me and vowed (*bāra vunā*) that if his business develops with the help of my god he will help to develop this shrine. I did some rituals for him, and his business developed. Now he has about three or four vehicles. He then proved his



vow by building this shrine and placing asbestos sheets on the roof. Now people know that there is some magic (*haskam*) here.

The shrine when I visited had a room and an open veranda. Inside the room, a statue of Kadavara and other supernatural beings were arranged on a large table along with other ritual objects. Many Buddha statues were also kept on one side with separate offerings. A picture of the table is given in figure 17 below. A red cloth was draped over the ceiling inside the room. His wife helps him with preparing the rituals and assists him when he is in a trance. He told me that her role was similar to that of an assistant. I further asked him what he meant by ‘magic’ that led people to come to him for various practices of sorcery. He explained to me,

People did not respect me at the very beginning. They thought my god had no power. Some even challenged me to show power. Then once during a ceremony at the Vishnu shrine in the temple, god tranced to me and broke a big black stone in half. That is when people started to believe in the power of my god.

*Figure 17 The Statue of Kadavara at the Village Shrine*



The belief or faith in a ritual specialist is then gradually acquired with the power that he can demonstrate. The power is determined by the outcomes of the rituals he performs for his clients. The *gurunānse* reminded me that he is not the one who has the power to perform rituals but his god-Kadavara. He only lights a lamp and invites Kadavara to enter



into him. He is a body that the god possesses in order to interact with others who come seeking help. He claimed that he does not remember anything that happens during a possession as it is the god talking and acting using his body. His wife is the one who remembers what is said during the possession and informs him once he is back to his self. The *gurunānse* said that he has to preserve the body in specific ways decreed by his god. He said,

I can't eat at ceremonies sitting on tables or under makeshift shelters (*udu viyan*), I can't take alcohol or anything that would make me intoxicated, I can't even cut my hair. See it is turning into knots (*hādapalu getenava*). Once I cut my hair because it got very difficult to clean, it becomes knotted, and the god punished me. He made me sick and gave me lots of trouble. After that, I promised him that I would never cut my hair. Then only he stopped punishing me.

From the rules that the *gurunānse* has to obey, not cutting his hair that then turned to knots has similarities with Obeyesekere's discussion of the 'matted hair' of female ritual experts (*maniyō*) (Obeyesekere, 1981). For Obeyesekere 'matted hair' is symbolised with the ritual specialist's sexuality (Obeyesekere, 1981). Focusing primarily on women, Obeyesekere argues that the loss of conjugal relations with the husband is superseded by sexual relations with the god that possess their bodies (Obeyesekere, 1981). The matted hair then symbolises the god's penis that is said to be a 'source of life and vitality' (Obeyesekere, 1981, p. 34). The hair is understood as a gift from the god that resembles the close relationship between the ritual expert and the deity (Obeyesekere, 1981, p. 35). Publicly the 'matted hair' is said to arouse fear, horror, disgust in others (Obeyesekere, 1981, p. 36). However, Obeyesekere's symbolism of matted hair unsettles the link with sexuality in my account of a male ritual expert. Obeyesekere's interpretation reproduces the social narrative that portrays women's lives as primarily linked to their sexuality (Obeyesekere, 1981). I would suggest that the rules dictate a decorum for ritual specialists differentiating them from other lay people. The decorum positions ritual specialists as a specific category of people in the human world who can interact with the supernatural.

The *gurunānse* told me that he only practices 'good sorcery' (*suba*) and always declines any clients who want to engage in 'evil sorcery' (*asuba*). He described 'good sorcery' as the

practice of sorcery to heal an illness, find something that is lost and to help a person save their marriage and family life. 'Evil sorcery' was the use of sorcery to break a marriage, giving love potions (*ina*), digging for treasures (*nidan baranava*) and murder (*minimærum*). The *gurunānse* explained, 'I only give enchanted (*mathurapu*) amulets (*yanthra*) and knotted strings (*gæta dāpu nūl*) for people with illnesses for their protection (*āraکشava*). I do protection for land and houses (*bhumi āraکشava*), but I do not use my warrant to harm people'. Therefore, the understanding of sorcery as only to do with harm is premature (Selvadurai, 1973; Obeyesekere, 1975). The description of his practice of sorcery as only for 'good causes' indicates the dimension of morality involved. The fact that Buddhist priests who practice sorcery are considered to have higher status is also a reflection of morality. The head priest of the village temple indicated this when discussing his sorcery practice: 'I am a disciple of Buddha that itself is virtuous and pure unlike those demons whom people believe to trance into them'. Therefore, the ritual specialist's practice of sorcery is defined as moral by his decision to 'only do good sorcery' for his clients and by their connection with the different supernatural agents of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. However, the understanding of 'good sorcery' is linked with practices that would keep a marriage or a 'good family life' intact rather than rupturing them. As a result, the morality in the practice of sorcery is linked with whether the sorcery will break or make a marriage or a 'good family life'. In the following section, I will explore this further by exemplifying how sorcery is practised in the village to solve everyday problems.

### *Solutions for Everyday Problems*

Piyasiri in whose house I was renting two rooms in Divulvæva was a great believer in the practice of sorcery. He wore an amulet on a black string around his neck. The head priest at the village temple had given him the amulet which Piyasiri said held charmed oils of a dead leopard (*divi thel*). The object had great power that would serve as an anti sorcery device and protect him against bad planetary effects (*graha apala*). Piyasiri said that the priest advised him not to eat any meat, attend funerals or puberty ceremonies for 21 days after he was given the amulet to avoid getting caught to pollution (*killa*). The concept of *killa* as mentioned earlier is attached to women (Winslow, 1980; Kapferer, 1983; Stirrat, 1992). Demons are attracted to *killa* and are present around funeral houses, houses where a girl child had attained puberty, and houses where a woman is about to give birth (Kapferer, 1983). Even meat-eating is believed to attract demons because it is dead flesh.

Therefore, objects like amulets when first given to a person are supposed to be kept away from *killa*. However, when I asked the village *gurunānse* about *killa*, he had a very different opinion. He said,

It is a controversial topic. People associate *killa* mainly to women because they menstruate and give birth. The first menstruation of a woman is considered as the most dangerous of all because it is a beginning and is new. So, it is called a *navum killa*. Then there is death *killa* (*marana killa*) considered present at funeral houses. I studied about the *killa* a lot and had realised that it is nothing but carelessness (*nosalakilla*). If the ritual specialist does his job correctly, no demon can affect the amulet or string. I mean *killa* is everywhere, this whole earth is the biggest *killa* because it holds buried dead bodies. Women menstruate every month, that is nature you cannot stop it, so if there is *killa* how can a woman ever wear an amulet or a string? I am a married man, and I live with a woman. If there is *killa* how can I work here (in the shrine)? I think if the rituals are properly performed nothing can impact the amulet or string. I do not ever tell the people who come here not to eat this, don't go here because that itself impacts their psychology (*manasikathvaya*). Then that is dangerous more than anything. All of this is done to improve the psychology (*manasikathvaya boda karanna*) of the person.

According to the *gurunānse*, the skill of the ritual specialist should be able to avoid pollution rather than restricting the behaviour of the person. The practice of sorcery is to change the 'psychology' of the person from negativity to positivity as indicated by Kapferer when describing healing rituals (Kapferer, 1979c, 1979a). Even the healing practices of 'good sorcery' is performed to bring a positive mental attitude to the person. Moreover, what I found from talking with Piyasiri and others is that the practice of sorcery is also linked with 'what caused' the negative mental attitude in the person. In this sense, sorcery is practised not only to change the mental attitude of the person but also to change the things in the environment that is said to be causing problems or negativity. For instance, the amulet is said to protect Piyasiri from 'bad planetary energy' and 'sorcery that others might do to him'. Further discussion with Piyasiri leads me to understand that the root of

the need for him to be protected rises from a family problem that brought about a mental imbalance in him.

Piyasiri has a history of mental health problems which made him attempt to kill himself. As a result, he was admitted to the psychiatric ward at the national hospital in Colombo. At the hospital, Piyasiri explained that others told him that he would run after female nurses and try to kiss them. However, he was taken from the hospital to a priest who practised sorcery in Yatiyanthota in the Sabaragamuwa Province in Sri Lanka, and with the treatment he received, he recovered. I asked him when his mental health problems emerged. He said that it was when his wife Nandāvati eloped with another man leaving him and their two children. Afterwards, Piyasiri had become addicted to cannabis and arrack. He had gone to Nandāvati and begged her to return for the sake of their children. His suicide attempts had begun when she refused to return. However, Nandāvati had returned to him and cared for him when he was admitted to the psychiatric ward. Having recovered through sorcery, Piyasiri had become an ardent believer in the practice and used it to solve problems in his life. Sorcery healed him and changed Nandāvati's immoral behaviour causing her to return to restore their 'good family life'.

Therefore, Piyasiri's negative mental energy originated from the time his wife left him and their children to be with another man. His unusual behaviour which caused him to be diagnosed as mentally ill and admitted to the psychiatric ward can be linked to the concept of 'aloneness' in a man - this made him vulnerable to the attack of a demon. Again the gendered view about 'aloneness' and 'demonic attacks' becomes unsettled with Piyasiri's experience. What becomes apparent is that people of any gender, when troubled with problems in family life that create an 'insecurity' in them, are likely to enact their existential crisis through unusual behaviours. The healing rituals that are performed to restore the person back to normalcy are also expected to restore the ruptured family life. Nandāvati's return and care for Piyasiri also assisted his recovery. Since that episode, I was told by both Piyasiri and Nandāvati that they had a 'good family life' with their two children. When I met them, both of their children were married and lived in different areas of the island. Piyasiri and Nandāvati seemed to have a happy life together. They worked together to breed ornamental fish to sell which made a livelihood for them. As elders, they were also actively involved in religious activities and pilgrimage. Hence, healing through sorcery restored Piyasiri's mental attitude as well as their 'good family life'.

The turn to sorcery to restore self and ‘good family life’ was further illustrated by Nadī, a 34-year-old mother of 3 children. She explained to me that when she and her husband Ishan had a significant bad period with violent disputes every day, she consulted a *gurunānse* and did a ritual at their home that was explained to me as ‘we did a treatment for the house’ (*api gedara ta sātbtuvak kara*). After the ritual, Nadī said the disputes decreased, and she got pregnant with their third child. Since then, in her opinion, the violence in the house has decreased although it is not absent. I am not able to record the nature of the ‘treatment’ given to Nadī’s house, but in her opinion, it restored their ‘good family life’. Their family problem was to do with Nadī’s suspicions of Ishan having extramarital relationships. She said that her doubts started one year after they married through elopement. She explained that to console herself, she engaged in various practices of sorcery. Nadī said that she visits a Buddhist temple called *vatte pansala* which is considered a place of magic and is said to have been built by the great queen Vihara Mahā Devi (205BC-161BC). She explained the power and magic of the place to me saying that women could not enter the temple when menstruating because a white snake that guards the temple would appear and attack them. When I further inquired about what she did at this temple, she explained,

There is a shrine for god Vishnu at this temple that is said to hold much magic (*haskam*). The *kapumahathtaya* at the shrine told me to light a lamp for god Vishnu for 21 days and come back to the temple and break a coconut asking the god to show me if Ishan had other relationships. I did this ritual, and you will not believe, it is only after that Indika left his phone with me allowing me to go through his text messages and find out about his contact with his first girlfriend from school days.

Ishan’s mother is also helping Nadī to practice sorcery against Ishan. Nadī said ‘she (Ishan’s mother) is the one doing most of the sorcery, not me. She does sorcery to make him have erectile dysfunction. ‘Then he cannot have sex.’ She laughed aloud after explaining this and said ‘sometimes I wonder if she has done the sorcery to prevent him having sex with me!’.

Nadī also had an amulet in a black string around her neck. She explained to me that she also has a string around her waist to stop menstrual bleeding. She said,

My bleeding goes on for long periods and hardly stops. So, I went to the shrine in the village and got a *nūla* from the *gurunānse*. Then only the bleeding stopped. I was asked to get a scan done on my belly by the doctor. They took the string off for the scan, and I started bleeding again then and there.

She explained to me that she wears the string and the amulet for all her problems and illnesses. Similar to Piyasiri, Nadī takes refuge in sorcery for her health problems and her family problems. The practice of sorcery in this manner is conceived as ‘good’ or of morality by ritual specialists and their clients. It is because the sorcery is to heal the person who is ill and also to change the immoral behaviour of a spouse who is threatening to disrupt the family. By displaying an ‘unusual behaviour,’ the person is attempting to change the inappropriate behaviour of the spouse and therefore restore ruptures. In this sense, sorcery is practised to restore morality in a spouse and maintain a ‘good family life’ in the house.

Nadī explained her motive to practice sorcery as,

When he comes home after working in the mill, he complains of aches and pains here and there and asks me to massage him. When I put oil and massage, I feel like kicking him, but then I will lose everything I developed, my home, my children. There is no use of fighting, going to the police or mediation boards. Society will not let a woman live alone without a man. Even now I get unnecessary calls from men because they know that my man is not good and we have problems. They try to take advantage of my situation. It is best just to tolerate, practice sorcery and try to keep the man under control. After all, we eat from the same pot of rice! (*monava vunath api eka bath muttiyen ne kanne*).

The loss of or insecurity within conjugal bonds that I have described here has different impacts on men and women. Nadī believed that being a woman she needed Ishan for her

security and protection. According to Piyasiri's account, he ran behind female nurses and tried to kiss them. This suggests that his insecurity was in part due to a loss of physical intimacy. For Nadī and Piyasiri losing their 'good family life' was the main crisis. The practice of sorcery was a way for them to control their spouses who were threatening the 'good family life'. As Nadī said, she attempts to keep Ishan 'under control' so that his extramarital relationships will not destroy family life. In this manner, both men and women engage in practices of sorcery to protect themselves and their families. Interestingly, it is believed that these practices have leverage than state institutions when it comes to handling disputes and their consequences. I would argue that it is the duality in sorcery to both harm and heal that might change the behaviour of others and restore morality in people's connections (*badima*).

These positive experiences with sorcery lead people to persuade others with similar problems to use these methods. For instance, Premalatā advised Lakshmi saying,

You should go to the Kadavara shrine at Kalavæva and break a coconut asking that woman [Rasika] to be punished. When you explain your plight to the *kapurāla* there, he will tell god Kadavara of your sorrows and write the name of the woman on a charmed coconut for you to break. There is no sin (*parak*) in doing sorcery against women like that.

Premalatā justified the practice of sorcery as moral because Rasika was threatening Lakshmi's family security. In this sense, the practice of sorcery is popularised and justified by villagers based on the need and the intention behind the practice. Champika, another friend of Lakshmi's, advised her saying,

My husband was doing the same thing to me, and I went to this *devalē* and did a *gurukama*. Now, my husband lives like a dog with me; all our properties are under my name. You should go there [to the shrine] and do the same.

Therefore, by practising sorcery, Champika was able to obtain power over her husband who, she claimed, was now like an obedient pet. In this way, the practice of sorcery brings power to the person who is moral. As a result, Lakshmi decided to resort to supernatural

means to protect her interests. I had the privilege to accompany her to the Kadavara shrine and then the shrine that Champika recommended, which was dedicated to Kālī and situated in a Buddhist temple managed by a Buddhist priest. In the following section, I will describe Lakshmi's two encounters with Kadavara and Kali in an attempt to solve her problems.

### **An Encounter at the Kadavara Shrine**

I first accompanied Lakshmi to the Kadavara shrine on the bund of Kalavæva on a Wednesday that is said to be an auspicious day (*kemmura*) for dealing with the supernatural. We first went to the office of the *kapumabathaya* to ask what is needed for an offering to make a vow (*bāraya*). A vow means to keep a problem 'in charge of' the supernatural (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p. 149). Once the problem is solved the person, who made the vow will come back with offerings to give thanks to the supernatural. To make the vow, a young man who was in charge of arranging the offering platters told us to bring a coconut, incense sticks, areca nut, betel leaves, coconut oil, sambrani, camphor (*kapuru*) and a packet of wicks. The items could be bought from a lorry parked in front of the shrine that specialised in things that are necessary for offerings at the shrine. The woman in the lorry who gave us the things said 'people come here asking for a good marriage partner or asking to bring back the partner when they leave the marriage' (*minissu methanta kasāda karalā denna kiyalā enavā, dāla giyāma āpahu genna ganna enavā*) reflecting on the kind of problems that people consulted Kadavara for. We took the bag of things to the assistant at the shrine and waited till he prepared the offering platter. Once it was prepared, we were asked to go into the main Kadavara shrine with the offering platter. Lakshmi tied a coin in a piece of red cloth (*padura*) and kept it on the platter symbolising her vow. If Kadavara helped to solve her problem Lakshmi would 'fulfil her vow' (*bāraya oppu karanavā*) by visiting the temple with another offering platter. She kept 200 rupees as a fee for the service given in the shrine. Figure 18 below illustrates Lakshmi's offering platter to Kadavara.



Figure 18 Lakshmi's Offering Platter to Kadavara



Once inside the shrine, the *kapumabathaya* asked each person who brought in an offering platter the reason for it. Lakshmi said that her husband had taken another woman and she came in search of relief from the demon god. Afterwards, the *kapumabathaya* started beating a drum and singing. He first asked for Buddha's and the greater god's permission to perform this offering and then invited the seven Kadavara (*bath Kadavara unnnānselā*) to come to bless these people in need. Lakshmi was gritting her teeth and crying during the ritual. Seeing her distress, the *kapumabathaya* took her platter first and asked the demon god to see her and her children's plight and cause the other woman who 'set fire' to her home more pain than Lakshmi and her children. He further asked the demon god to send Lakshmi's husband home freeing him from the clutches of the other woman within 7, 14 or 21 days and reuniting him with Lakshmi. Afterwards, the *kapumabathaya* gave Lakshmi the coconut she kept on her offering platter along with the coin tied in a red cloth. He told her to go around the shrine three times thinking of her heart's desire and break the coconut in the space in front of the shrine and tie the *padura* on one of the wooden pillars in front of the shrine. Lakshmi did as she was told. She later told me,

I was crying thinking of all my sorrows; I am sure he (Kadavara) heard me. Though the *kapumabathaya* said to send him (Upul) back, that's not what I want. But when I went around *devalē* and tied the *padura*, I thought of what I really want. He and that woman should suffer as much as my

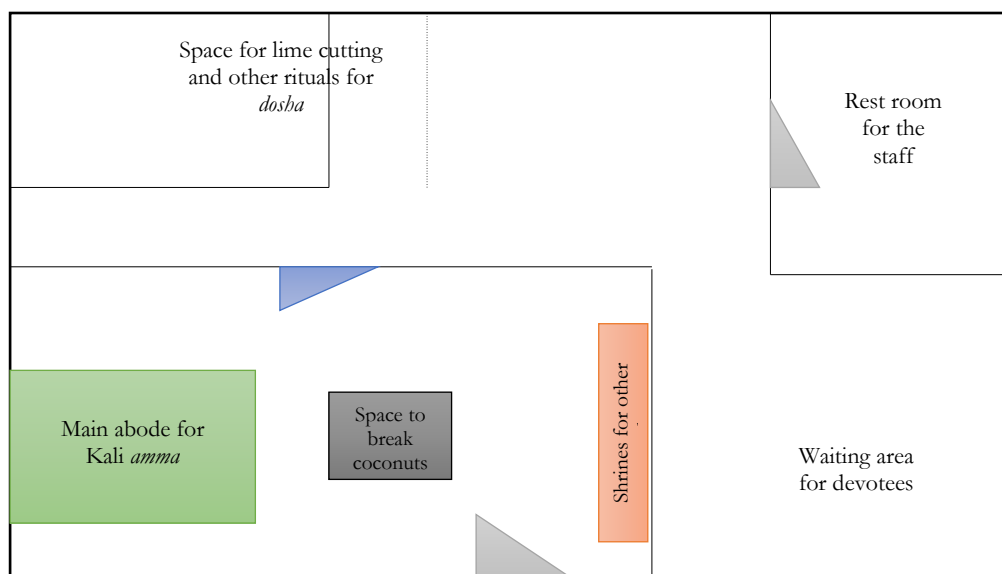
children and I. I know god will help me. I have not done any wrong to anyone. He should help me’.

Lakshmi’s vow to Kadavara was to tell him of the unjust acts that had happened to her, a moral person. She claimed that she had always been ‘good’ and not harmed anyone. As a result, she believed the suffering she was facing now was unjust. Furthermore, Upul and Rasika were ‘bad’ because they were immoral, rupturing a house and a family. Lakshmi believed that the demon-god who had the ‘double aspect’ of being both good and evil would be good to her and evil to Upul and Rasika. She reasoned that her morality and their immorality would be considered by Kadavara when he solves the problem that she put him ‘in charge of’. The act gave Lakshmi an outlet to vent her sorrows and confide her suffering in a powerful supernatural. As mentioned earlier, the relationship to Kadavara for the people of the region is given meaning as one between a father and his children. A father should be just and discipline his children in morality. By causing suffering to Upul and Rasika, their immoral behaviour will be changed to one of morality. More specificities of the expected suffering are explained in the following section when Lakshmi interacted with Kālī, popular in the image of a mother, to intervene to heal her suffering and restore her ‘good family life’.

### **The Intervention of Kālī**

↙ The Kālī shrine I went to with Lakshmi was situated in a temple that was newly built and probably emerged after the MDP colonised the area. Unlike the conventional temple structure, this temple had no dome-shaped *stupa*. The only structures were a *bo* tree, the shrine for Kālī, a hall with the priest’s office, and the house (*āvasa gē*) where the priest lived. The shrine had three sections, a central space where the relics were kept with statues of Kālī and a space to break coconuts. On the side of this central space was another room where limes were cut for those with troubles (*dosha*). Another hut was built near the shrine that the employees of the shrine, used as a restroom. Kālī’s shrine was decorated with limes and neem leaves that are considered to have cooling properties (McGilvray, 1998). All three structures were built with mud bricks. People claimed that these structures were older than the rest of the temple. As a Buddhist priest managed the shrine, it was particularly popular for sorcery and drew devotees not only from Divulvæva but also from elsewhere on the island. The floor plan of the premises is illustrated in figure 19 below.

Figure 19 Floor Plan of the Kālī Devale



Champika's sister Nelum volunteered to come with us to the Kālī shrine. When we arrived at the temple, the priest was in his office. He spends the mornings checking horoscopes and reading *nimithi* - predictions made based on the time you visit him and your answers to his questions. The shrine opens only in the afternoon around 2pm for sorcery practices. Nelum told us to sit outside while she spoke to the priest. We heard her speak with the priest and say that Lakshmi is a friend of hers and needs his help. Apparently, Nelum knew the priest very well as she had undertaken his services many times. The priest asked Lakshmi to come in. Lakshmi indicated me to come with her. When inside, the priest asked Lakshmi to name a flower, a bird and select two numbers from a chart he had on the wall. Afterwards, he asked Lakshmi whom she wanted to inquire about, and she replied 'my husband'. The priest said, 'he is under a spell, he has lots of *apala* (bad planetary effects), because of this he is no longer with you'. Lakshmi said 'Yes, he has gone with another woman'. The priest asked her, 'Do you want that woman dead or punished? To kill her you will have to spend about 50,000 rupees (GBP250) if you want only to punish her it will cost about 5,000 rupees (GBP25)'. Lakshmi was unsure of what to say; after a moment of thought she said 'it's enough to punish her'. The priest gave her a pink paper with a list of things she had to buy for the *pujava* (offering ritual) to offer to Kālī for the sorcery. He told Lakshmi 'I have the stethoscope in my hand, I will give a good treatment, don't worry'. He asked Lakshmi to not eat anything with meat, fish or eggs until the *pujava* was completed.

The priest's *nimithi* was the method used to diagnose the problem that Lakshmi had come to seek a solution for. His prediction that Upul was no longer with Lakshmi shows his ability to diagnose problems. Then, his treatment was to either kill or punish Rasika who has caused Upul to leave Lakshmi. The decision here is an indicator of one's morality, but financial ability also restricts it. Lakshmi depended on her father and brothers to make ends meet in her house; she did not have the money to kill Rasika. She told me later that she used the 5,000 rupees her father gave her for *Avurudu* to pay for the sorcery. The priest as a Buddhist monk practising sorcery for evil compromised his morality. By virtue of his saffron robe, he is supposed to only do sorcery for good. Yet, his popularity as a sorcerer was derived from his relation to the Buddha. This enabled him to conclude that in Lakshmi's case, Rasika's immoral behaviour meant that it was no sin to harm her. Therefore, both Lakshmi's and the Buddhist priest saw their acts as justified.. Interestingly, the priest, as well as Lakshmi, framed the punishment to be only for Rasika rather than both Rasika and Upul. The expectation from the practice of sorcery was to detach Rasika from Upul and reunite him with Lakshmi and their children while causing suffering to Rasika. Therefore, the ultimate aim of this sorcery was once again to restore the connection (*badima*) between husband and wife.

We went with Nelum to a nearby shop to obtain the list of things required for the offering platter. Similar to the lorry at the Kadavara shrine a boutique next to the temple specialised in selling all the necessary items for the various *puja* (plural of *pujara*) at the shrine. After obtaining our list of things, Nelum said that she had to get back home. She told Lakshmi to be strong and to think of what she wants from Kālī during the offering and then to do the rituals at home that the priest would prescribe. After bidding good-bye to Nelum, Lakshmi and I went to the shrine to hand over the things to arrange Lakshmi's offering platter. Once we handed the goods to one of the employees of the shrine, he wrote Lakshmi's name on the bag and gave us a number. We were to wait until two in the afternoon for the *pujara* to start. The ambience reminded me of a doctor's clinic at a hospital where patients wait outside with a numbered token to be seen by the doctor when he arrives. There were many others from various parts of the country who had come to the shrine. When speaking with them while we waited, I realised that all of them had come to resolve a family problem with the help of Kālī.

For instance, a man and a woman had come to the shrine to ask Kālī to stop their daughter's love relationship with a married man. The father said that the man had tricked his daughter by claiming to be unmarried. The parents had been to various ritual specialists to find a way to change the daughter's behaviour. The parents were worried because the daughter's actions would harm her respectability and the family's reputation. The father explained, 'if something happens to her I will have to take up the burden, but I am an old man now, I do not have the strength to retake the burden of a daughter.' His statement indicated that the responsibility for a daughter is handed over to a husband when she comes of age but if she fails to find a proper husband and harms her respectability the father will have to take her back as his responsibility. The couple believed that sorcery carried out at this shrine would assist them in saving their daughter from her predicament. Their younger daughter who was having trouble with her mother in law had been to this shrine before and had good results. Based on her experience she had advised her parents to visit this shrine to address their elder daughter's problem. The father said, 'I have spent nearly 125,000 rupees (GBP625) on sorcery to no avail. But I have faith here because it is done by a Buddhist priest based on Buddha's virtues (*budu guna*) rather than demons and spirits (*perethayo*) that possess a sorcerer'.

A young woman of 24 years had come with her two-year-old child to seek help from the demon goddess to save her husband going astray from her. Her husband works as a driver in Colombo and therefore spends most of his time away from home. When he visits home during weekends, he beats her because he suspects that she is having affairs in his absence. She told Lakshmi and I that she had been to this shrine before and as a result of that visit her husband changed his behaviour by not beating her. However, she thinks that he has affairs with other women in Colombo which was the reason for her second visit to the shrine. The priest had confirmed her doubts through *nimitthi* and said that the husband is heading towards extramarital relationships. To stop him he had advised her to do another sorcery. Therefore, she was waiting with her two-year-old son for the shrine to open and the offerings to start. She told us that she lied to her husband and came in secret and was therefore fearful that he would call and find out that she was not at home. She was anxious to give the offering and leave as soon as possible. She said, 'I hired a trishaw though I do not have much money so that I can get home quickly'.

A mother and a daughter had come from Negombo on the western coast of Sri Lanka to the shrine to perform sorcery against their husband/father. They had taken a very early bus to reach the shrine and were sleeping on the benches in the waiting area. The woman said that her husband is having an extramarital affair and is giving his wealth to the other woman. He has sold some of his properties and given the woman money. The mother and the daughter are worried that he will give their wealth to her and would leave them with nothing. The mother said 'my daughter is still in school. She has her whole life ahead of her. This man is selling our properties and giving that woman money. He beats me when I speak about this. I am hoping that after coming here, my suffering will end.'

Another woman sitting away from us spoke to me later and said that her husband and mother in law had done a form of sorcery unknown to her (*kodivinaya*) so that she falls ill. They had done the same before, and she had got ill with heart problems. Then, she had come to this shrine with a friend of hers and practised sorcery to counter the *kodivinaya* and had recovered afterwards. She said every night she lit a lamp for Kālī as part of the sorcery, and she felt better day by day. However, yet again they had done a *kodivinaya* to her, and she was feeling sick. This time the *kodivinaya* has been done not only to her but also to her house and her business she said. She had a tailoring business specialising in making women's *saris* and jackets. She said that she had to close her shop because of her illness. Her husband who works in Colombo had come to see her and the children during *Avurudu*. She said that he manipulated the children with expensive gifts and turned them against her. In tears, she said he must have done the *kodivinaya* for her to leave home. The children were also willing to stay with the father rather than with the mother. She was hoping that Kālī would help her counter the *kodivinaya* against her and bring her peace.

The few hours until the priest arrived were spent by the devotees discussing their family problems and offering each other consolation. They did not introduce themselves by name to one another but referred to each other in kin terms assumed by the looks of a person. For instance, an elderly man or woman was referred to as *māmā* or *nandā*, and in return, they would refer to the younger woman as *duva*. The women spoke to one another as *akkā* or *nangi*. It was like a self-help group as they were all suffering from similar problems. They did not know one another at first, but after sharing their plight, they became more familiar to one another. None of them exchanged phone numbers for future contact. However, for those few hours, they shared very intimate details of their family

lives and their suffering. It was significantly an opportunity for the devotees who were mostly women to share their sorrows with others who had gone through or are going through similar suffering. Even for Lakshmi, it was an opportunity to voice out her sorrows and get consoled by the other women who had similar problems. Lakshmi told me later, 'I realised that I am not the only one with family problems, so many women have the same problem as me'. Knowing that other women like her burn from the same problem as she helped Lakshmi to bring perspective to her problem.

The priest walked into the shrine at around two in the afternoon. He first purified the shrine by sprinkling turmeric water all over the space and then offered incense. He went into the main abode of Kālī inside the shrine where the relics and statues are kept and started chanting to obtain permission to start the *pūjā*. A red curtain covered the main abode, and only the priest could go beyond the curtain. He took each *pūjā* in the order it was given and told Kālī of the plight of the devotee and asked her to help them. Each of the devotees that went into the inner room came out with a small bag. When it was Lakshmi's turn, I went in with her. Lakshmi kept a 5,000-rupee note on her offering platter. When we went into the inner room, the priest took the platter and went behind the curtain. On a table, I saw three red eggs lying on beetle leaves in a basket. He came back and sprinkled turmeric water on us and asked for the names of the culprits. Then he wrote each name on two of the eggs with a brush using a red ink that looked like blood and did a design of a swastika on the third. He took the eggs inside and started pleading (*kannalar*) to Kālī about Lakshmi's plight. He said to Kālī that Lakshmi and her children are suffering while her husband Upul and his courtesan Rasika are living happily in luxury. They were happy despite Lakshmi's and her children's tears and sorrows (*dukkha*). This unfair situation had to change, he told Kālī. Lakshmi should be given her right to her wealth and property and to have a comfortable life without suffering which was her and her children's right rather than a courtesan's. The priest then cursed Upul and Rasika saying 'Destroy! Destroy! Upul Kumara and the courtesan Rasika' (*Upul Kumara saba Rasika yana vaishyanganava vinasha veva! vinasha veva!*). He said to Kālī that Lakshmi would come back with an offering and help to develop the shrine if her wishes were fulfilled. Then he came out with the eggs wrapped in a newspaper. He asked Lakshmi to break the eggs at a cemetery without stepping into the cemetery as a sacrifice to Kālī. He gave her a coconut to break in the shrine. Then, he gave her a piece of paper with instructions for

conducting rituals at home. He also gave her a bottle of neem oil and an amulet attached to a lime. He emphasised to Lakshmi to ensure that the rituals were performed in secret.

The suffering that was to be inflicted on Upul and Rasika was intended to break their *badima* and restore family life with Lakshmi. Upul had taken the wealth and comfort that Lakshmi and their children had enjoyed with him when he left the house to be with Rasika, who was now living in comfort with Upul's wealth and protection. This is the situation that Lakshmi wanted to reverse by means of sorcery. Rasika and Upul should be punished and Lakshmi and Upul's marriage and 'good family life' restored. Kālī was invoked by Lakshmi to intervene to achieve this outcome. The eggs she was given at the ritual were to be sacrificed to Kālī who is said to live in cemeteries. The visit to the shrine gave Lakshmi an opportunity to express her anger. The rituals that were to be performed in private at home were an extension of this performance and gave her time and space to, as Hoggett and Frost put it, 'think through' her suffering (Hoggett and Frost, 2008). In the following section, I will explore the rituals she performed at home to illustrate how these helped to cool down the fire in her house and further address the anger that was in her.

## Healing Unseen Wounds

The instructions given by the priest told Lakshmi to make a lamp by cutting a papaya fruit in half. For 21 days at nine o'clock each night she was to light the lamp with the neem oil that the priest gave to her. Neem is believed to have profoundly 'cooling' powers when used medicinally and is even used to cure pimples caused by heat and other skin conditions (McGilvray, 1998). In this context, the oil was intended to cool Lakshmi's anger. Lakshmi made a small shrine in a mango tree in the garden that was not very visible to others and lit the lamp there. She hung a few neem branches around her makeshift shrine (see figure 20 below). She dutifully lit the lamp every night for 21 days and went without her dinner before lighting the lamp as a sign of her commitment. She also refrained from eating any eggs, meat or fish. She lit the lamp and told her sorrows to Kālī every night. This act gave Lakshmi a means to vent her worries to a powerful source who is thought of as a mother (*Kālī amma*). As such the deity listens without interruption to Lakshmi's sorrows and was believed to act on her wishes. She told me that she felt a connection (*badima*) was being formed between her and Kālī. She said she knew that the demon goddess with her dual ability to be good and evil was going to help her. Lakshmi's expectations of Kālī reflect



the beliefs about the demon goddess in legend; she is said to have battled against evil to restore good in the world.

*Figure 20 Lakshmi's Shrine for Kālī*



The amulet given by the priest was to be buried in a clay pot and covered with clay mixed with turmeric water. Figure 21 below shows the amulet with the lime that was to be buried in the pot. The pot was then to be kept on the hearth and lit. The instructions emphasised that the hearth should not be used for anything other than to heat the pot containing the amulet. The fire of the hearth was created to bring fire into the lives of Upul and Rasika. The woman who took us to the Kālī shrine, Nelum, told us that the more fire that was put into the hearth, the more troubles Upul and Rasika would have. So, Lakshmi very faithfully found firewood and made sure that the hearth was lit everyday heating up the clay pot with the amulet. It is interesting to note that the hearth that is usually used to cook and feed the family was now being used to inflict suffering to those who had ruptured this.

*Figure 21 The Amulet with the Lime*



After a few weeks, Lakshmi started to hear from people that Upul and Rasika were seen fighting inside the shop in town and Rasika was seen crying. Lakshmi was happy about this news; she said ‘they cannot live happily after causing the children and me such suffering. That woman will have to suffer for what she did to my family.’ The moment Lakshmi heard from someone that Upul and Rasika were fighting, she would go to the kitchen and create more fire in the hearth with the clay pot. Lakshmi said that she wanted to see Upul realise what kind of a woman Rasika is and for him to regret leaving her and the children. I noted that she did not want Upul to suffer but to realise and regret his behaviour. It is from Rasika that she wanted revenge. In Lakshmi’s eyes, it was Rasika who broke the household by doing sorcery and then taking him away from her and the children. Lakshmi’s intentions illustrate how women attempt to restore the house when means, such as tolerance, the courts and the police, fail. After the rituals were completed, Lakshmi began a beauty culture course in the hope of opening a beauty salon to earn an income. She learned to take the bus to Anuradhapura alone to attend the classes. By the time I was leaving the village she had confronted her crises and was slowly re-building a life for herself. The encounter with sorcery could be seen as part of a therapeutic journey for Lakshmi in which her unseen wounds were healed.

## **Concluding Reflections**

For a woman, marriage and family life are the two major investments which must be built and carefully preserved. When this is threatened, however, women are expected to tolerate difficulties in order to preserve family life. However, as I have illustrated with Lakshmi's narrative, this is not always the case. At times, women bring attention to the problems they face by expressing their suffering in various ways. In such instances, the houses become labelled as 'problem houses' with the failure being a woman's responsibility. Nevertheless, I have illustrated strategies that are used by women to overcome this. The appeal to the state, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is just one such attempt. However, the attitudes that women are confronted with when approaching the state compels them to look elsewhere. In this chapter I have shown how women use sorcery and the supernatural to heal themselves and restore the 'good family life'.

## Chapter 7

### That's not Love but Greed!: Perspectives on Love and Sex after Marriage

One afternoon I joined Premalatā and her neighbours, Vimalā, Lakshmi and Mādhavi who had gathered in Premalatā's garden for a chat. The two younger women, Lakshmi and Mādhavi, were sitting on the pavement letting the older women have the comfort of the plastic chairs. I found myself a place next to Lakshmi and Mādhavi and listened to the ongoing conversation. The women were speaking about love (*ādare*). Vimalā who had got married following a love relationship in 1976 said: 'in our days love was beautiful, but nowadays love has become a beautiful mistake'. She claimed that in 'her time' lovers had to have great intent to pursue love because they didn't have easy ways to communicate with one another. She was saying that with the arrival of mobile phones it is now easier for lovers to be together. However, to Vimalā this change has made love a 'beautiful mistake' rather than beautiful. Lakshmi responded to Vimalā's comment saying,

The *bādima* called love is in one's heart. Having intercourse with a woman or man can be done at any time with anyone. But, only love is heartfelt. That is the *bādima*. Even if you are apart for many years if you love each other you will not feel like going with another man or a woman.

Mādhavi contributed to the conversation saying,

We think something is love and get married and after a while realise that there is no love, and then we start searching for it again. That is why men and women both have other relationships.

Vimalā in response to Mādhavi exclaimed: 'that is not love but greed!' (*ēka ādare nemei kēdarē!*). Vimalā's allusion to love as a beautiful mistake was a catchphrase taken from a famous Sinhala love song by the singer, Karunaratne Divulgane. The chorus of the song translates as,

Love is a beautiful mistake	<i>ādaraya sundara varadaki</i>
Never forgiving	<i>kisidā samāvak nam nathe</i>
By showing me love	<i>mata pennalā ālē hati</i>
You have given me enough suffering	<i>nuba dunnu duka bondatama ati</i>

The song is a lament about a love that failed to bring the lovers together. The women were reflecting on the song in the light of their own experiences of what happened to love after marriage. For them, the ‘beautiful mistake’ lay in their failed expectations. Lakshmi’s view of love as the basis of a *bādima* that does not rely on sexual intercourse makes an important distinction between love and sex. Mādhavi’s explanation that men and women have extramarital relationships in order to find the love that marriage has failed to give them, reinforces the idea of the ‘beautiful mistake’. However, the marital dispute between Lakshmi and Upul that I have detailed in the previous chapters shows the problems and tensions that such relationships create. However, Vimalā’s interprets these relationships as arising out of ‘greed’, that is, an intense selfish desire to have an excess of something. In this chapter, I will further explore the interpretations that these women gave to love and sex in their lives. I will end with a discussion of how new technologies, in the form of televisions and mobile phones, have influenced women’s understanding of intimacy by creating space for them to experience new kinds of relationships outside of marriage.

## Giving Meaning to Desire

The women’s afternoon conversation about love and sex continued. Vimalā further explained that she does not encourage intercourse with her husband now because they are both elders and should, therefore, live a *brakmacāri* life, free from physical intimacy.<sup>24</sup> She said ‘I don’t even remove my clothes in front of him now; it may induce feelings in him. We sleep in two separate beds. I would wish to even sleep in two separate rooms. But we don’t have enough space in our house’. Mādhavi laughed, and pointing at Premalatā, who is also an elder, joked ‘I can still hear these two at it’. Premalatā also laughed and with a smile said, ‘I have to keep my marriage, he is my man’ (*digē thiyaganna ōne nē, magē minihā nē*). She further said ‘conjugal couples should be together until death. It’s a sin that man has no woman. It is said that they have more sexual desire’ (*abusamiyo ekata jīvath vena one mārenakanma. Ē minihata gani nāthi eka hari pau. Ungē kāmē vādi kīyalanē kīyanne*).

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<sup>24</sup> The definition of *brakmachari* is to abstain from marriage and sexual relations. However, in this context Vimalā meant that she and her husband though married abstain from sexual intercourse as a principle of the elderly to lead a pious life.

Vimalā's view on the sexuality of the elderly exemplifies the expected passive sexuality of a mature woman who has passed through the menopause. Winslow explains that older women are considered to be able to attend milk mother's ceremonies (*kiriammavarun ge dane*) because they are beyond the pollution that comes with active sexuality and therefore have the power to give blessings (Winslow, 1980). Ideally, after living as a good and chaste wife, a woman should abstain from sexual relations and lead a pious life without pollution. However, Premalatā challenged this normative view indicating that a conjugal couple must 'be together' until death because the man is said to have more sexual desire. The wife should submit to his needs until death. Restricting or preventing a man's sexual desire is a sin for the wife and could be a reason for the man to go astray. Therefore, as Premalatā said, to keep a marriage, a woman should have sexual relations with her husband who is after all 'her man'.

The women's discussion identifies male sexual desire as a need that should be fulfilled. This view runs counter to a discourse which sees female sexuality in Sri Lanka as the more uncontrollable force (Obeyesekere, 1963a; Stirrat, 1992). Consequently, female sexuality needs to be controlled by a man in order to avoid disrupting social ideals (Obeyesekere, 1963a; Stirrat, 1992). In contrast, what the women here were suggesting was that they had less sexual desire than men. For the women, their need for sex was seen as a responsibility performed in their role as good wives. Premalatā shed further light on this situation by pointing that: 'after 10 o'clock in the night if you hear arguments and fighting in a house it is because of this (i.e. sex)' (*ræ dahayen passé gedaraka guti gaha gannavanam ē okata tamai*). Men believe that they have a right to satisfy their sexual desires even if this involves the use of force or coercion. The women believed that this type of marital rape happens because of men's sexual desire and that it is a woman's duty to satisfy him. Not to do so is to threaten the relationship and to risk men seeking satisfaction outside of marriage. For example, people assumed that Upul had left Lakshmi because of troubled sexual relations. Lakshmi once told me that a woman in the village had said: 'though you are so beautiful, to leave you, he must have had another reason'. Even the village midwife, Ganga, told me that she had asked Lakshmi whether Upul's affair was connected to a problem in their sexual relations. The different ideas of sexual desire in men and women illustrate an unequal power in sexuality that further represses the woman

(Brickell, 2009). However, this poses the question of how women interpret their own desires.

Lakshmi and Vimalā strongly disagreed with Premalatā's statements. For them, the *bādimā* of love is founded on virtues such as care, trust, loyalty, and honesty rather than in physical intimacy. Lakshmi further explained the difference between love and sex by saying, 'if you love somebody you don't need to touch and romance all the time and show the world, it is anyway a very private thing, true love can survive without seeing or hearing from one another because it's in one's heart' (*ādare nam hāmōtama pēnna allagena ādare karanna ōne nā, ēka pudgalika deyak nē, aththa ādare ta dakinē nathuva ābennē nathuva vūnath pavathinna puluvan, mokada ēka hadavathē thiyennē*). Vimalā followed on by saying, 'love is not in silly words but the heart; if you care by giving food and water, look after when sick what else do they want? Can you mollycoddle men? You have to be stern with them' (*ādare thiyennē oya bolada vachana vala nemi bithē. Kanna bonna dila balā gannava nam, ledada dukata balanavanam vena monavada ōne? Minissu hurathal karanna puluvan da? Unta sārata inna ōne*). Vimalā's statement fell in line with a woman's duty as a wife and mother. In this sense, for the woman love is about care. For instance, Lakshmi described her love for Upul saying, 'I would wake up in the morning and cook, then send the children to school with Upul, then I will sweep the house and cook lunch and take a warm rice packet for Upul to our shop. I used to cook meals with finger millet especially for Upul because he had diabetes, after doing all that he left me for that woman'. Therefore, from the women's perspective, love is not simply about sex but about care within which sex is an obligation to the husband.

In return women expect the same kind of care from their husbands. For instance, Lakshmi claimed that she felt loved when Upul bought her clothes, took the family on trips, and laboured for their prosperity. It is in such 'acts of love' in everyday life that women desire for and judge a man's love for them (cf Trawick, 1992). Premalatā echoed this sentiment: 'Lakshmi, you know how much you did for Upul, and then what happened? He left, didn't he? And what did he give as a reason? He said that you don't love him!' (*Lakshmi uba kochcara Upul ta karāda? Mokada vūnē? Dala giya nē? dunna hēthuvath mathaka ne? ū kīrvē uba ādare nā kiyala!*). Lakshmi blushed at Premalatā's directness. She looked away and didn't respond. Premalatā explained that sex itself is a *bādimā*, 'when a couple have intercourse they bond together. Then it's very difficult to stay away from one

another'. For Premalatā, sex, and not just love, is the way in which couples connect to one another. She further explained this to me in relation to her marriage with Jāgoda:

Whatever happens between a couple, the woman can draw her man to her. When they live under one roof even if there is hate love will happen. Those days my daughter used to say that '*appachchi* comes home to love *ammā* not us'. This is why you have to check compatibility (*porondam*), if the genitalia is a bird's one can always engage in intercourse if it's a dog's only for a certain season. I am a lioness, a very proud animal. If a woman thinks she cannot, it really means she cannot. But the man has no control. This is why there is rape. He has beaten me a lot for this. Though he wanted to, I didn't. A man takes a woman for this task.

In Premalatā's view, physical intimacy between a conjugal couple can sustain the marriage and deepen the connection between them. Therefore, to form a *bādimā* between a conjugal couple both physical and emotional intimacies are necessary. By comparing horoscopes before marriage, as Premalatā claims, a couple can decide whether they are sexually compatible which will in turn impact on the future of their relationship. A balance between the desires of men and women is thought to bring fulfilment in line with the expected responsibilities of a husband (as provider) and wife (as caregiver) and is, therefore, necessary for a good marriage. However, within these arrangement women are not indicating that physical intimacy is unnecessary. Vimalā's suggestion that a woman have to be 'stern' with a man shows that they do have some power to control male desire. However, when women exercise this power domestic violence typically occurs as in Premalatā's observation about what happens after 10 o'clock at night and other stories of men forcing their wives to have sex.

Vimalā went on to point out to Premalatā that both emotional and physical intimacy is necessary for a successful marriage:

Yes, yes what I am saying is when men want too much of it, it is greedy. You cannot be doing that all day with your man can you? He also has to have a limit to his sexual desire. Upul was greedy that is why he left



Lakshmi, nothing else. Now, don't you see, that woman [Rasika] is washing his hands and showing to the whole world.

Lakshmi then said, 'that is true *nandā*, only after 16 years of marriage did he miss being called 'golden one' (*rathtarane*) and 'my pet' (*patiya*). He said to me that woman (Rasika) talks to him with such loving words, and that is why he left me. It is his greed as you say'. Premalatā agreed to this and said that she told her husband-Jāgoda that she wishes after a certain age, men should lose their genitalia making them unable to have intercourse. The women laughed at this and claimed that in such instances they should bury the male genitalia as they would bury the dead. This was their solution as to how a man's inability to control his sexual urges could be solved.

For Upul, however, his actions were not driven by greed and excessive desire but suggest his sense of an unmet need for love within the marriage. Rasika talking to him in loving ways was an important part of his attraction to her. However, for the community, Rasika's actions led her to be labelled as a *hora gani*. This term translates as 'robber woman' which also has connotations of being bogus or secretive. As in the English synonyms of robber and housebreaker, in Sinhala, a *hora gani* is also used to describe those who break up houses, not so much physically but emotionally by detroying the relationships in them. In th village, Rasika was the most notorious housebreaker. She was decribed to me as 'ugly, dirty and immoral'. A housebreaker was portrayed as the antithesis of a 'good' wife. Vimalā described Rasika as, 'that woman, she has no shame or fear. People from her village say bad things about her. No one associates with her' (*ara gani ta kisima lajja bayak na. ēki ge gamē evun ma ēki gana naraka kathā kiyanne, kavuruth ekiva ashraya karannē na lu*).

Vimalā further described women who go against the moral order: 'these women display all of their 64 charms to capture the man.'<sup>25</sup> Because they are scared that the man may leave, the second (woman) has to do things to take the place of the first, they bathe the man and dab him to keep him' (*ganun ge māyam 64 dāla allagena tiyā gannavā. Dāla giyoṭh kiya. Mokada devaniyā palaveniyā ge thāna ganna oboma karanna ōne nē. hōdala thawala*

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<sup>25</sup> 64 *māyam* are considered 64 ways in which a woman can entice a man with gestures by using her eyes, smiling, laughing, touching herself, walking, talking, faking, and sleeping. More specific mannerisms include: rotating the eyes, closing the eyes, looking from the corners of the eyes, smiling from the corners of the mouth, laughing vigorously, biting the tongue and showing it, waving the hand, looking at her clothes, touching her legs, drawing lines using her foot on the ground, walking and shaking the legs, having her hair loose, showing a fake fear etc.

*thiyagannē*). Relevant here is the fact that the *hora gani* has no legal rights over the man and has no right to his wealth and property. The view of the villagers was that such women can only hold on to men by tempting them with their sexuality. Explaining this Vimalā said, ‘any *hora gani* would even wash the backside of a man to keep him with her. That’s the way. That is why that woman is washing Upul’s hands and mollycoddles him in public. That is how they keep the man. And for a man he wants nothing more than that’ (*onama hora ganeyek taman laga minibava tiyāganna passa vunath bōdanavā. Ē bāti. Ēka thamai oya gānith atha hodaneī hurathalen kathā karanneī. Ehema tamai oya minibava allagena tiya gannē. Minibatath ōken ehata deyak nā*). According to Vimalā, women should only go so far in caring for a husband and not in public, as Rasika was doing. What was crucial for Vimalā is that marriage provides women with legal rights to a man’s wealth and property. Therefore, even if love fails in the marriage, she has legal ground to protect her interests. On the other hand, a *hora gani*’s only hold on a man would be through seduction.

Bringing another perspective to extramarital relationships, Premalatā spoke of a woman called Chāndani who was having an affair with a man named Indika who was apparently ‘half her age’. Indika was an unmarried young man, while Chāndani was a married woman with two daughters. Chāndani’s eldest daughter was only two years younger than Indika. Premalatā related the story as follows:

When I asked Chāndani why she was keeping this young boy she told me, ‘you don’t know the inner issue I have *nāndā*, my husband could never make me happy. But Indika brings me happiness. So, even if we can’t be together, I love him. Because of that, I keep giving him food and clothing. I found what I couldn’t get from a man.’

Chāndani’s relationship appears to fulfil her ‘unmet desires’. She expresses these in term of care and emotional intimacy but rumours in the village suggested that their relationship was also sexual. In this sense, extramarital relationships, even if impermanent, are a cause for happiness and relief. Nevertheless, the public see these relationships as transgressions of the social order and therefore a source of stigma. In the next section I describe how the arrival of new technologies in the form of televisions and mobile phones creates new possibilities for women to escape from oppressive and unfulfilling relationships.

## Virtual Intimacies

Nowadays in Divulvæva, an essential item in any household is a television. No matter if the house is complete or half-built, there is at least a small television. At the time of my fieldwork, a trend to broadcast lengthy ‘mega-teledramas’ was at its peak. These television shows are similar to Western soap operas, and mostly imported from India and dubbed in Sinhalese. Private television stations broadcast mega-teledramas back to back from 7.00pm until 10.00pm on all seven days of the week. The same dramas were then repeated in the mornings for anyone who missed an episode. I soon came to realise that most women attempted to finish their housework by 7.00pm to sit down to watch these dramas and not get up from their seats in front of the television until 10.00pm. The advertisements were also conveniently long, giving women time to rush around serving dinner to their husbands and children before returning in time to watch the drama. Even during the daytime when I visited households for my survey, the television would be switched on with the same dramas. Though nobody may have been watching the television, there appeared to be some comfort in just having it on. I assumed that the familiar voices on the television were reassuring, giving the woman some company when her husband and children had left the house for work and school.

The storylines of these mega-teledramas were a popular conversation topic among the women in the village. When they met each other for afternoon chats or at the canal, they would discuss ‘what happened’ and ‘why it happened’ in a certain mega-teledrama. They would also speak about the problems of choosing which drama to watch as there were so many to choose from. Posters of actors in popular mega-teledramas appeared in tabloids and women’s magazines. I have also seen similar posters hung in buses and three-wheelers for decoration. The mega-teledramas had become a part of everyday life. However, the women were also concerned about letting their children watch the mega-teledramas as they worried about the moral messages given in them. Some women said that they had forbidden their children to watch mega-teledramas because they give ‘romantic ideas’ to school-age children. Others said that they could not control the children watching the mega-teledramas because children come to know about them from friends in school. As most of the mega-teledramas had already been broadcasted in India, the children were said to watch future episodes on the internet and inform their mothers about what was going to happen next. The mega-teledramas were more than entertainment for the

women, they created conversation topics, discussions about the morality of what was being shown, and illustrated the impact of global mass media on everyday life.

My observations in Lakshmi's house made me realise how these mega-teledramas influenced women's thinking about romantic love. Lakshmi watched several mega-teledramas from 7pm to 10pm. The children too were allowed to watch what she watched. Lakshmi's favourite was an Indian mega-teledrama series dubbed in Sinhalese, titled, *Sadabatama oba mage* (You are Mine Forever). The drama was a love story between a woman named Ishani and a man named Ranvir. The couple enter marriage as a twist of fate, with Ishani's consent but not her love. Then the drama reveals how Ranvir unconditionally cares for Ishani even though she does not care for him or reciprocates any of his feelings. Throughout the story, Ranvir does not claim his rights to have sexual relations with his wife, as a husband could but he decides not to touch her until she loves him in return. He believes that his love for Ishani is true and she will understand his feelings and reciprocate in time. Lakshmi idolised Ranvir for his unconditional love for Ishani. She claimed that Ranvir's love is 'true' because it is set apart from sexual desire. Lakshmi justified her claim by saying that Ranvir's feelings for Ishani do not fade away in the absence of sex. It is interesting to note that, the storyline in the teledrama and Lakshmi's idea of love that she had argued for with Premalatā bear strong similarities.

Another mega-teledrama that Lakshmi watched was called *Mē ādarayay* (This is Love). In this drama, a barren woman Ishita marries a divorced father of two, Raman. The reason given for the marriage is Ishita's love for Raman's daughter, Ruhi. The story revolves around their 'good family life' and the various challenges to it. In the beginning, Raman is an arrogant, stubborn man who was hurt by love when his first wife left him for another man. He takes out his frustrations on Ishita by fighting with her, misunderstanding her, and not trusting her. Lakshmi disliked Raman with a passion. She said that he was not a good man because he did not love Ishita who was a loving, caring, chaste wife and mother. Lakshmi even stopped watching the drama because she believed it was giving a wrong message about love. Lakshmi said 'its fake, Raman is such a bad man he does not care about Ishita at all. I do not know why she is with him. Ranvir is the best. He is a true lover'. Lakshmi's reaction to the two mega-teledramas illustrated how ideas of love as an emotional intimacy rather than a physical intimacy is formed. Mega-teledramas imaged love as kind, compassionate, understanding, protecting and unconditional. The men in

these dramas were honest and loyal to their wives. In keeping with the ideal image of love, even Raman later transforms into a 'true lover' in the drama.

The way the women relate to the characters, personalities, attributes and storylines of mega-teledramas is important in formulating what Lee describes as an 'imagination of love' (Lee, 1998). This term is intended to capture a belief in the existence of fictional attributes of those who appear in personal advertisements on the internet and newspaper. He claims that, because people advertise the desirable qualities of a partner as ones that they possess, it is believed that such people actually exist (Lee, 1998). In a similar manner, women, inspired by what they see on television, imagine that there are such people in the world. With such ideas in mind, they then tend to look for them in the world. Verheijen speaking of women in rural Guatemala explains how they reflect on telenovelas to understand the gender equity that is lacking in their everyday life (Verheijen, 2006). In explaining this, Verheijen asserts that the viewers will perceive, interpret, adapt, and incorporate the messages shown on television subjectively to their life experiences (Verheijen, 2006, p. 25). In a similar manner, the women's understanding of 'true love' in *Divulvæva* is influenced by the teledramas. The women relate the messages given in the stories to their own life experiences and see the virtual portrayal of love and lovers as having significance in their world.

This confusion of the virtual and the real is further evident in Mādhavi's comments about what happens when the need for love within a marriage is not met. In her case the escape was via a mobile phone. She explained to me how she regularly speaks with a man over the phone:

I know it's wrong to do so, and I know that man is not a good person as well. Or would he speak to a married woman over the phone? But my heart enjoys it, so I speak with him. We are still looking for love.

She declared that 'it's wrong' because she is a married woman with a child. She believes that the man is also wrong because he knows of her married status yet he is being intimate with her over the phone. Mādhavi justified the 'wrong' she was doing as enabling her to fulfil her heart's desire. She was not happy in her marriage to her husband, Suranga. He had no proper employment and drank with the little money he makes from labour work.

The financial issues and Suranga's drinking resulted in domestic abuse (I have seen bruises on Mādhavi's arms from Suranga's beatings). The man she spoke with over the phone brought her some happiness and took her mind away from her dire domestic reality. The introduction of the mobile phone has enabled women to communicate with men outside the previous constraints of the house.

## **Joys of the Heart**

Wilson describes that the practice of intimacies in everyday life has changed with the induction of new 'infrastructure' in the world such as cell phone towers, Wi-Fi transmitters, telephone lines, transportation and other material infrastructure in the environment (Wilson, 2016). This 'infrastructure' has enabled the emergence of digital technologies, such as television, telephones, the Internet, and mobile phones that in their varying capacities enable and disable intimacies in everyday life (Wilson, 2016). In a similar vein, Kuntsman speaks of intimacy in virtual domains as 'affective fabrics of digital cultures' (Kuntsman, 2012). She defines 'affective fabrics of digital cultures' as 'the lived and deeply felt everyday sociality of connections, ruptures, emotions, words, politics, and sensory energies, some of which can be pinned down to words or structures; others are intense yet ephemeral' (Kuntsman, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, the arrival of new digital technologies has opened a new dimension for the expression of intimacy.

Sirisena explores the use of mobile phones to express intimacy in Sri Lanka, focusing on the lives of young students at the University of Colombo (Sirisena, 2011, 2016, 2018). She explains how the mobile phone companies in Sri Lanka have enabled new forms of intimacy by forming mobile phone packages that cater to the needs of lovers (Sirisena, 2011, 2016, 2018). The use of the mobile phone to send SMS (short message service) and give calls that range from a ring and a cut to actual conversations represent intimate meanings to lovers (Sirisena, 2011, 2016, 2018). In this manner, Sirisena describes how mobile phones have created new spaces for couples to be together while being physically in different places (Sirisena, 2011, 2016, 2018). The mobile phone, as a result, has 'strengthened relationships, weaving intricate webs between the lovers and deepening their involvement, both in their eyes and the eyes of the general audience' (Sirisena, 2012, p. 183). The use of the mobile phone in this manner has 'carved out private spaces in public places' for the couples to enact their intimacy (Sirisena, 2012, p. 183). Therefore,

the incoming new technologies have become enablers of intimacy in everyday life for the youth of Sri Lanka.

Premalatā told me, ‘we didn’t have phones and SMS those days, all we could do is write letters, I remember taking letters to the boy Dingiri was friendly with, I was their broker. That’s why it was more beautiful’. In their time when communication between lovers was by letters the difficulties that a lover had to face to communicate entailed beautiful memories of love. It was more personal than sending a message or calling on a mobile phone. Moreover, the difficulty one has to go through to give the letter to their lover signifies the intent of one’s love. If the man gives up at the slightest difficulty then his intent of love is considered as not very strong. However, technological advances have replaced letters with mobile phones. I have discussed how mobile phones contribute to the ‘secret’ development of intimacies among youth in chapter three. Here I will extend this further as mobile phones have become a significant feature enabling women to develop extramarital relationships or what I refer to as ‘mobile lovers’. The term captures how men can move freely and easily into women’s lives. The popularity of mobile lovers in women’s lives in the village led one young man to say, ‘giving your wife a mobile phone is a sure way to have marital problems. Some even have smartphones, which is even worse. You look around and see every woman in a house that has a problem will have a mobile phone’.

Lakshmi herself acquired a mobile lover whilst I was in the village. Mihiri had persuaded her to speak to men over the phone to ‘quench her loneliness and forget her troubles’. She had given Lakshmi’s phone number to the man who owns the Internet café in town. When he started to call Lakshmi anonymously, she considered it harassment and scolded him. Lakshmi found out the identity of the man only when she installed Viber on her phone.<sup>26</sup> When she saw the photograph of the man linked with the phone number, as he too had Viber, she realised who it was. She was furious with Mihiri for giving her phone number to him. However, one night, when I stayed over at Lakshmi’s house, she asked me to go on my Facebook and search for a man named Kanishka Wedagedara (pseudonym). Once his profile came up, she asked me what I thought of him. I said, ‘he looks ok, who is he?’ then she related to me how she built a relationship with him over

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<sup>26</sup> A mobile application that allows people to message, make phone calls, share photos and videos via the Internet.

the phone. He had been at the police station when she went to complain of Upul's adultery and had overheard her problem and taken down her number when she gave it to the police officer. Lakshmi said, 'I looked horrible that day. He was not attracted to my looks. He said that he just wants to help me. I tell you he is such a good man'. Lakshmi never told me if she loved Kanishka, but she always claimed that he was better than Upul. She said, 'that person has very good qualities. Knowing that I am a married woman he never utters anything bad to me. He is a thousand times better than Upul'. In Lakshmi's terms, Kanishka was better because he had not indicated anything sexual to her but spoke to her in a caring manner. As Lakshmi was a married woman and not a virgin, Kanishka had the option to speak freely to her.

Kanishka was in fact a sales manager working in Colombo who visited Anuradhapura monthly for work. Lakshmi spoke with Kanishka two or three times a day over the phone. She would go to the back garden and sit on the cement water tank that had been built to bathe in and talk with Kanishka. She would send him text messages with loving words. After a while, he came to Lakshmi's gate and gave gifts to her. Once for her birthday, he bought her shoes which turned out to be the wrong size, so I went with Lakshmi to exchange them in Anuradhapura. Lakshmi too cooked meals for Kanishka and gave him rice parcels when he visited her. She did not explain herself to her neighbours who observed this interaction through the windows of their own houses. When I asked her of this Lakshmi said, 'no one can point fingers at me for anything. I have lived a very pure life even if my husband has left me'. She justified that her relationship with Kanishka was moral because it did not entail sexual relations.

Lakshmi reasoned that she needed to have Kanishka in her life on the grounds that her husband, Upul had abandoned her. She blamed Upul saying,

This is all Upul's fault. He took me in marriage at a very young age and then left me with two children. I left everything and eloped with him. But, he left me like I meant nothing. I feel like asking Kanishka to come here in his car and go with him to town and get down from his car right in front of Upul's shop. Then he will know that I too have other options.



For Lakshmi, Kanishka filled a gap that was left following Upul's betrayal and abandonment of her. Kanishka's care and concern gave her a sense of worth. Moreover, Lakshmi's intentions were vengeful in that she wanted to show Upul that she could attract other men. However, Lakshmi never acted on her threat and her relationship with Kanishka remained a public secret as everyone had their suspicions about her and the mystery car that came to her gate now and then.

One day Lakshmi was deeply upset because she got to know that Kanishka had been taken ill. Her reaction to this news made me realise how much the mobile relationship meant to her. She told me, 'he has been admitted to a hospital in Colombo because of chest pain. I am so worried. I want to go to see him'. Lakshmi had never been to Colombo. I was surprised by her bold decision to go to Colombo to see a man who she hardly knew. On another occasion when Kanishka told Lakshmi that his mother had throat cancer, she asked me to come with her to go to *Jaya shri mahā bodhiya* in the hot midday sun to make a vow. The way she managed to wade through the massive crowd at *Jaya shri mahā bodhiya* made clear her determination and dedication to perform the vow. The mobile relationship had become very significant to Lakshmi. I once asked her what she thought the future might be for her and Kanishka, and she said,

I am not thinking of anything more than what we already have. I have a grown-up daughter and son to take care of. Kanishka said that he is willing to take care of the children and me. But, his parents will not like him to marry a woman with two children.

Already having built marriages, children and houses Lakshmi did not see the possibility of a mobile relationship becoming permanent for a woman like her. The social taboos over re-marriage render mobile relationships impermanent. Women in these relationships enjoy ongoing care, attention, gifts and romance that the mobile lover bestows on them, but they are unlikely to lead to marriage. A few months later Lakshmi told me that Kanishka wanted to meet with her in person: 'he is asking me to come to Anuradhapura to see him. But I am not going to go because if someone sees they will start rumours'. I do not know whether they met in person or not but Vimalā had once told Premalatā that Lakshmi in the guise of going for beauty culture classes was going to meet with a man. The prying neighbours had indeed already started the rumours. Though women expect

no permanency in relationships with mobile lovers, there is often a desire to maintain such relationships.

The difficulties of making virtual relationships into actual meetings is made clear in tales that were told to me about a *būthayā* (ghost) in the village. The *būthayā* was said to be a mysterious figure that comes into houses where females are alone and peeps through the windows at night. The villagers claimed that if seen the ghost would run into the darkness without a trace. The common belief in the village was that the *būthayā* was a male pervert with a mental health problem (*manasika prashna tiyana minibek*). Another explanation by the villagers was that the *būthayā* was in fact a known figure coming to meet women in their houses but had unfortunately happened to misjudge the time so that others were around rather than the women being alone. As a result, I was told that *būthayā* sightings should be kept a secret as gossip could be created about the women involved.

I was told of three instances of *būthayā* sightings in Divulvæva during my fieldwork. The first sighting was by a woman alone in her house, as her husband had gone to work the night shift at the phosphate factory. The second was a young girl at her house who was sleeping alone as her parents went to the paddy field to turn water. The third sighting was again by another young girl who was in her room when the *būthayā* flashed a torch inside. In all three incidents, the women screamed, and the *būthayā* ran away. However, when analysing the stories in depth, the *būthayā* ran away when the women screamed only because there was help available within earshot. In the first incident, the husband had just left the house to go to the outside toilet when the *būthayā* peeped; as for the second incident the parent's paddy field was close to the house; and in the third, the father of the girl was still in the house when the *būthayā* flashed his torch. The conceptualising of *būthayā* in the village as how 'other men' secretly come to meet women to fulfil their unmet desires can be extended to both young unmarried women and married women. As I have discussed in chapter three, women, in general, are discouraged from having love relationships. Therefore, when they do have love relationships, it is kept a secret for as long as possible. The *būthayā* may therefore have been a lover coming to see a woman in the dark when everyone has gone to sleep. Mobile lovers may well be the *būthayo* that everyone was frightened of.

## Concluding Reflections

What I have explored in this chapter is the way that women think about love and sex, both within and outside of marriage. Though relationships outside of marriage are understood as a sign of excessive desires by the public, for those who experience such relationships, it is more a question of unmet desires. The dialogues that I report at the beginning of this chapter, show the contested nature of moral action regarding sex, love and care within relationships. These same questions arise when women use mobile phones to initiate relationships with men outside of marriage. With the help of mobile phones, women create spaces in which to find idealised love and lovers of the kind they see in telenovelas. Such mobile relationships are at first confined to a virtual space, but there are possibilities for them to become non-virtual. In this manner, women find ways to explore relationships outside of marriage with responsibility and care. However, this channel is one that threatens men who see mobile phones as a cause for marital problems and a reason for restricting women's access to them. What I haven't accounted for here is the use of mobile phones in general by men for the same purpose. The men women speak with can also be married men.

This description of extramarital relationships can be linked with Giddens's claims that the emphasis on individuality in the modern world has invalidated romantic idealizations of being 'one and only' and 'forever' as essential to marriage (Giddens, 1992). However, it will be an exaggeration to claim that a 'confluent love' similar to an 'erotic love' that is primarily based on sexual pleasure is the determinant of the fate of intimate relationships (Giddens, 1992). As argued by Jamieson, personal life remains within structural inequalities that require couples to creatively build their relationships with practices of love and care rather than sex (Jamieson, 1999). Therefore, the women's ideas and practices of love and sex reiterate that a gendered practice of intimacy in relationships is still sustaining inequalities rather than transforming them to be more equal (Jamieson, 1999). However, the opportunities created by new technologies have given women a space to build relationships that have similarities with a 'pure relationship' because their extramarital relationships are based on a freely negotiated contractual agreement between agents acting for themselves in an open market for the realisation of their desires (Giddens, 1992). Therefore, it can be said that realisations of desires outside of marriage, devoid of the expectations of conjugality, are more liberal and equal compared to the realisations of similar desires within marriage. Nevertheless, what becomes significant is

how women have carefully employed new technologies to fulfil their unmet desires. In consequence, the women's understanding of love and sex has created a language that legitimises their behaviour and interactions with other men that would otherwise be socially unacceptable.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

In late January 2017, after about 6 months since I had left Divulvæva, Lakshmi sent me a message through Viber saying, ‘he (Upul) came home on 1<sup>st</sup> of January’. When I further asked her about what that meant to her, she replied: ‘Rasika left for a job in the Middle East. So I think there will not be any problem hereafter. The children need their father’. I thought maybe Kadavara and Kāli had indeed shown their powers and detached Upul from Rasika and reunited him with Lakshmi and the children. Lakshmi too thought, in the same way, saying, ‘I am going to prove my vows to the gods’. In the months that followed, Lakshmi would occasionally send me messages about how things were in the household. In the first month after his return, Upul bought Lakshmi a brand new scooter, which Lakshmi proudly sent me a photo of. She pointed out that ‘this time the scooter is registered under my name’. Then, after a few more months, her messages were again about her suffering at the hands of Upul. Apparently, Upul still kept in touch with Rasika by mobile phone. He also put pressure on her to do household work. He had constant fights with her about her attempts to learn ‘beauty culture’ whilst working as an assistant in a salon. Lakshmi wrote to me complaining that: ‘I am just living because I am alive, I am tired of everything. He hits me and fights with me. I am leaving the house. I am losing my life’. She moved into her father’s house for a while until Upul came back to make peace with her and take her home. Lakshmi’s life continues in this pattern. This is just one story of many from a village in the dry zone of the teardrop-shaped island called Sri Lanka.

### Everyday Afflictions

Women are also *jara* (unclean), manifested most clearly in their inevitable menstrual periodicity. A woman is a creeper trailing where it listeth, feeding on filth, excrement or dung. She has neither the strength nor the intelligence of the male, nor can she provide for herself, work at arduous tasks or go about alone; she has to suffer the pangs of childbirth and has to be under the domination of the husband for her whole life. Her’s is essentially a low birth (*pahala jati*), unlike the noble (*utum*) *jati* of the man.

Her birth as female is a result of bad karma (sin), but once born as a female it is very difficult to achieve malehood in subsequent births.

(Obeyesekere, 1963a, p. 326)

The above quote from Obeyesekere's article on pregnancy cravings indicates the image of a woman in Sinhala culture (Obeyesekere, 1963a). As I found during my fieldwork, the observations of Obeyesekere, though from the 1960s are relevant to how women are socially seen even today. The woman's low position in society is generally to be subjugated to male authority. Her birth itself is a sin; an act of bad karma. Given these sentiments, it is no surprise that women themselves give meaning to their domestic suffering in terms of bad karma. Indeed, their existence in the world itself brings significance to the understanding of bad karma and its working through as a 'universal law of cause and effect' (Wood, 1961, p. 13). A person's present condition is thus seen as determined by the morality of their past actions. These consequences are believed to recur until enlightenment and cessation of birth (Wood, 1961). Among the women in this study, karma features as an important part of the rationalisation of their suffering. For example, it arises as a consequence of the suffering that they caused for their parents by eloping with their husbands (as in Mihiri's and Lakshmi's cases). Such narrations give meaning to women's circumstances as being caused by their own actions in past lives as well as in their present lives. The suffering of women is thus given a certain inevitability because they are, in a Buddhist sense, born to incur suffering, and be victims (Mahoney, 1994; Das, 1996; Nabokov, 1997; Gomez and Gomez, 2004; Mookherjee, 2006). However, what is interesting to me in the narratives that I have illustrated in this thesis is women's capacity to operate within this subjugation in order to make their lives habitable (Das, 2015).

The capacity of women to manage their everyday lives and better their circumstances illustrates that while they are victimised and made vulnerable by condition, they are not without power to act in the face of affliction (Das, 2007, 2015). Popular theoretical discourses of vulnerability understand it in opposition to resistance or as a requirement to bring about social transformation (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, 2016). However, like Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay have explained, vulnerability and resistance have multiple meanings owing to the context and political questions it poses (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, 2016). The vulnerability can be given meaning as a 'failure of infrastructure' that

makes people vulnerable for they depend on the infrastructure (Butler, 2016, pp. 12–13). The infrastructure that Butler speaks of is in relation to materiality that brings stability to people in the forms of the absence of which would make people vulnerable (Butler, 2016). The same principle can be applied to help understand how for women their marriages and family lives provide an infrastructure that shelters them. The women themselves comply with social norms of domesticity and caring by aspiring to be ‘good’ wives and ‘good’ mothers which can only be achieved by having husbands, building houses, having children and maintaining a ‘good family life’. Failure to achieve the ideals of marriage and family life brings women suffering because it is the infrastructure that they depend on and the route to a good life. In consequence, responses to everyday affliction have to be practised within the woman’s responsibility as a caregiver in forms that will protect the infrastructure she has built and invested in.

Bracke brings meaning to resilience as ‘the prize that many of us have come to set our eyes on as we seek to navigate the constraints and possibilities of our daily lives’ (Bracke, 2016, p. 53). Exploring ‘gendered resilience’ Bracke draws attention to the ‘postfeminist resilience’ in women who survive patriarchy (Bracke, 2016, p. 65). Here Bracke explains that those who deviate from the kind of female image that Obeyesekere portrayed are displaying resilience by turning ‘damage’ into ‘opportunity’ (Obeyesekere, 1963a; Bracke, 2016, p. 67). However, the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ labels given to women as some stand to overcome social hierarchies while others stay obedient to them bring shame-fear into operation. The women I have given voice to here, attempt to show resilience within obedience so that the overcoming of social hierarchies is not labelled as immoral and humiliating. For instance, when Mihiri was labelled as a ‘ripened’ girl by the villagers and was castigated by her husband, his family, and the villagers, she took refuge in the role of a caregiver as the means to re-establish relationships with them. Moreover, Lakshmi’s practices of sorcery and even her mobile phone relationship was justified as being moral because she thought herself to be acting within social norms. She was practising sorcery to mend the ruptures to her marriage and family life, and she was having a mobile relationship in physical distance from the confines of her house. These instances serve as ways in which women showed defiance that was not necessarily a public challenge to their circumstance, but a capacity to make afflicted spaces into ones that are habitable.

## Managing Everyday Life

Not everyone succumbs to suffering in the same way, even if their souls are marked by what they have had to endure. Many people within the same environment move from one threshold of life marked by bleakness, even abjection, to some other threshold at which they seem to engage with others, laugh, eat, have sex, look after children, greet visitors.

(Das, 2015, pp. 2–3)

In Sri Lankan society, the socialisation of girl children from the time they gain perspective of their bodies at puberty is to teach them passivity and endurance of pain and suffering (de Alwis, 1997, 2002; Lynch, 1999a; de Mel, 2001; Hewamanne, 2003). As Latā mentioned in chapter five, it is the mother's duty to teach their daughters to be tolerant in order to have successful marriages and family lives. When the social order is transgressed, as explained in chapter three, mothers are blamed for not teaching their daughters the propriety that they should uphold in social life. The social blame that is directed at mothers leads them to use violence against their children to bring them into line with social expectations. This was seen in the violence used to try to prevent love relationships. Also, in chapter five, we saw how Lakshmi disciplined her children for their failures to comply as good girls and good boys. Both examples show how mothers discharge their responsibilities for the moral condition of their children. In this manner, mothers try to protect their daughters from future afflictions by teaching them passivity and tolerance in the face of affliction. It might also be argued that mothers are teaching their daughters to become vulnerable. However, within the everyday, there is the possibility of how to be defiant is also communicated. For instance, when Lakshmi practised sorcery, it was witnessed by her daughter. In other words, daughters also learn how to work within their vulnerability. In this manner, the capacity a mother has to deal with threats to marriage and the 'good family life' is recycled into her daughter's future.

The endurance of suffering that women learn from a young age is drawn on to manage ruptures in marriages and family lives. The ruptures I have described include domestic violence, financial issues, extramarital relationships, suicide and self-harm, and drunkard husbands. These were dominant themes in the narratives of Anjali, Manjulā, Latā, Mādhavi and Lakshmi. The social viewpoint of these ruptures is that they are temporary



and impermanent and therefore should be tolerated by women. Such interpretations are based on the primary belief that families should stay together. There is thus a strong pressure to hold onto the marriage and not divorce the husband.

State institutions also reproduce the same cultural narratives compelling families to stay together. Even in the realm of sorcery, the same pressures are present in that the ritual specialists set out to punish the illegitimate lover and reunite the married couple. In all the places in which women might seek relief, there is a folding back on to the idealised role of caregiver. Woman's suffering in everyday life thus becomes normal and unseen. Should women attempt to resist this pressure by for example, leaving their partners, the consequences are likely to be harassment from other men and gossip about impropriety.

The reason why Lakshmi accepted Upul back leading to a continuation of the cycle of violence is a fine example of how this process plays out. Her vulnerability as a woman and as a mother compels her to practice what I refer to as a 'careful' resilience that will not ultimately jeopardise her investment in marriage and family life. As illustrated in the stories of all the women in this thesis, they had given up education and any opportunity of developing a skill to be independent to build marriages, houses, and family lives. The threat of losing this investment is an existential crisis for a woman as her envisioned future relies on it. As illustrated in chapter five, Lakshmi's wrath against Rasika was mainly because she had threatened everything Lakshmi had built in her adult life to secure a future for herself and her children. The rupture created insecurity in Lakshmi about her future that once she calmed down led her to start a beauty culture course in the hope of developing a skill to secure her life independently. However, Upul's reaction to her effort illustrates how men become insecure when women attempt to develop skills that may give her independence. The violent reactions from men to stop women becoming independent is a significant pattern reported from elsewhere on the island (Gamburd, 2000; Widger, 2012, 2015b). It is clear that men face profound insecurity when women show the possibility of independence without their support as providers. When women go beyond their responsibilities as caregivers, the social order based on houses, marriages and family lives become unsettled. Every effort is thus made to sustain this order by compelling men and women to remain in their expected roles as caregivers and providers. However, the lack of social and economic opportunities for women to face life independently means they have to look for solutions within the parameters that are set for them.

As we have seen, the house is an important site for a woman's material and emotional investment. It is a space in which she can act with a degree of freedom and authority (Carsten, 1997, 2004). I have illustrated in chapter four how women manage to maintain houses as 'good' houses. However, sometimes houses remain as 'problem houses'. As in Lakshmi's narrative, when houses become 'problem houses', women turn to their social networks, to the state, to the supernatural, and even to virtual spaces provided by television and mobile phones. These spaces provide people with avenues outside of the home that help women cope with their afflictions (Das, 2015). Social networks gave Lakshmi relationalities to fall back on and to fill the gap left by the absence of Upul. The state gave her a space to vent out her anger and bring attention to her suffering. Sorcery provides Lakshmi with a therapeutic journey enabling her to think through her situation and creatively respond to it. The mega-teledramas on television also provide women with imaginal spaces in which to escape their dire realities taking refuge in alternative realities in ways that give them hope. Teledramas give glimpses of love and lovers that are very different from their husbands. As I have illustrated in chapter seven, the prominence of mobile phones in everyday lives has enabled women to move in a virtual space and experience relationships that fulfil their unmet desires. In this manner, the variety of spaces in women's everyday lives serve as 'different thresholds' that they can move in-between to manage their everyday lives (Das, 2015).

## **Building Relationships**

Women differ from men in that their connections are unmade and remade at a greater number of critical junctures in their lives, not only through aging and dying, but also in marriage and widowhood.

(Lamb, 1997, p. 199)

The main factor that brings significance to how women manage everyday life is in their capacity to develop relationships. In this the concept of *badima* described in the introduction to this thesis is fundamental. It is a woman's capacity to manage *badima* that enables her to render transgressions socially accepted, to become dominant in households, to bring knowledge of her afflictions to others, and to develop relationships outside of marriage to fulfil her unmet desires. By caring for those in her household, she

develops connections with her husband, her children, and even other kinds of relationships such as lodgers or other men. Then by linking with women in other houses, women develop networks within the community that result in reciprocal practices such as sharing food, helping in chores, borrowing things, and visiting each other. Out of these relationships come resources that enable women to manage their everyday problems. For instance, Lakshmi protected herself from domestic abuse by getting her children to accompany her around the house. She gained financial support from her father and brothers when Upul stopped providing for her. Then she drew on networks of close women friends and neighbours for support in dealing with Upul.

As I illustrated in chapter two, the capacity within women's networks is crucial in maintaining village life. The networks built among women are formalised as 'women's Societies' that have executive committees and common funds. The women are able to apply for loans from the common fund which also assists them in solving everyday problems. Village level societies, such as the Death Donation Society depend mostly on women to function. It is women who attend meetings and convey messages to their households. In the event of a funeral, it is women who contribute their labour to support and cook meals for the funeral house. As a result, the *badima* built by women is a foundation that holds not only family life but also village life together.

There is, however, a contradiction: a woman's ability to build relationships can also be a source of affliction. The uncertainties and temporalities attached to relationships cause suffering to women when relationships fail to conform to expectation. For instance, in Lakshmi's case, her mother in law's acceptance of Upul and Rasika into her house was a strong sign of her affine's approval of the relationship. Furthermore, the gossip Lakshmi heard, which was believed to have been spread by Premalatā and Mādhavi, caused her much pain as those with whom she thought she had strong *badima* were betraying her. Above all, Upul's betrayal by leaving Lakshmi for another woman was an existential crisis for her. However, in the relationships she developed with supernatural powers her unseen wounds were rendered visible, and the problems in her *badima* had the potential to be addressed. The therapeutic journey that occurs through the practice of sorcery allows women such as Lakshmi to find strength in themselves and take control of their lives. For instance, after doing the sorcery, Lakshmi began her beauty culture course in the hope of opening a salon to earn an income. Women's relationships with other men outside of marriage over mobile phones is another instance of building relationships that help them

find worth and happiness. In all such instances, what becomes apparent is how women are able to build relationships to remake spaces when the *bādimā* of more immediate relationships fail.

## Hope and Optimism

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -

(Dickinson, 1983)

The capacity of women to build relationships and utilise them to deal with everyday problems leads me to conclude with a discussion of hope and optimism. By building, maintaining, and mending ruptures to relationships women hope to achieve the ‘good’ life they imagined when they first considered love, marriage, houses, and children. Women by ‘folding’ their suffering are attempting to better their life (Das, 2007). They are demonstrating what Appadurai has referred to as a ‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai, 2013). However, the very hope for a good life is also what brings those troubles and suffering. When women express the desire for love, they are met with violence for transgressing the social norms of propriety. When they elope, desiring a better life with their lovers, they are again met with violence. When they attempt to build houses in which wealth and intimacy might secure a stable future, they are threatened by ruptures. There appears to be no end to a woman’s suffering as it changes shape and challenges her everyday existence. Lives that are lived in this manner are full of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2011). Berlant defines cruel optimism as,

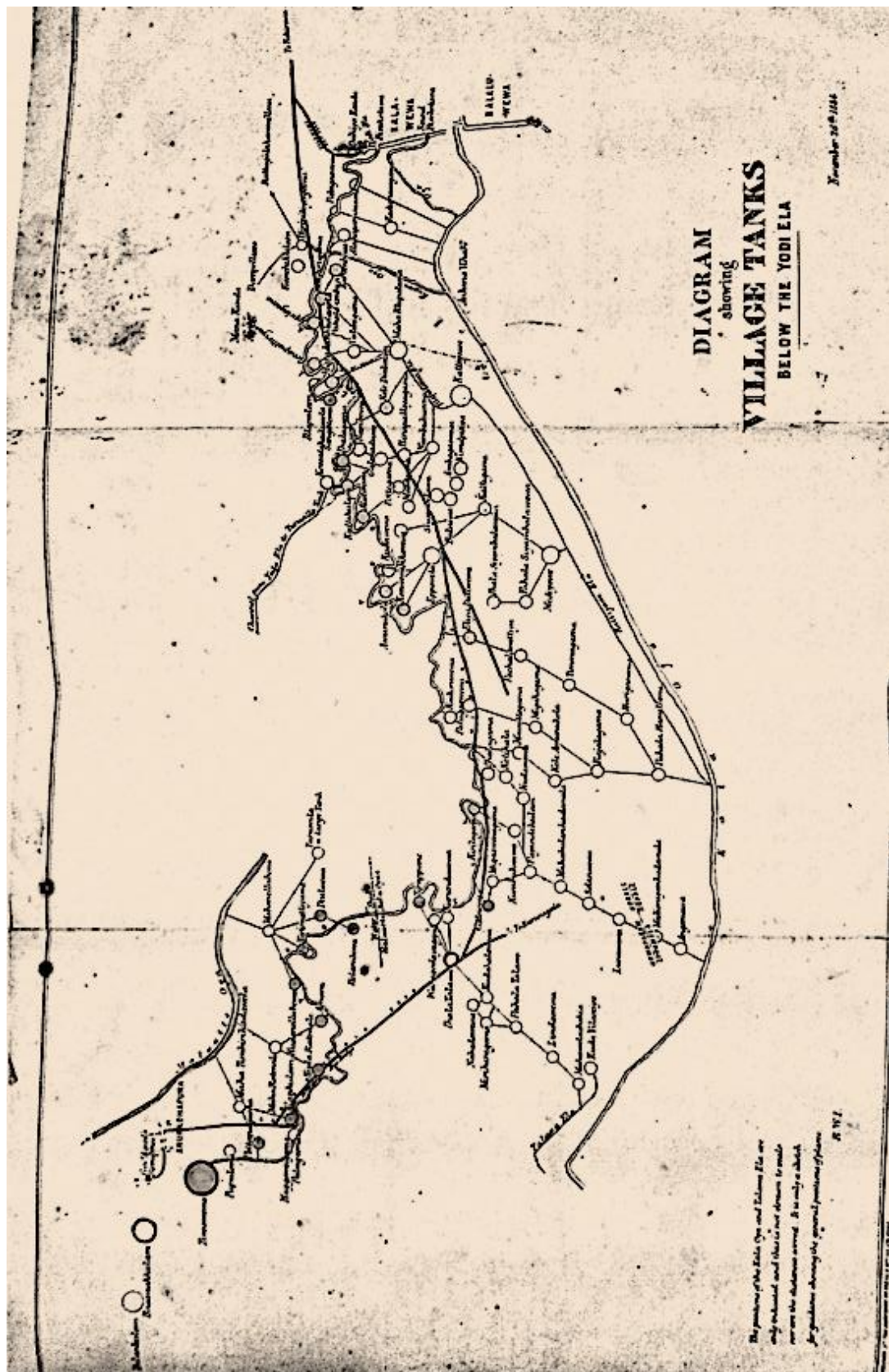
A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

(Berlant, 2011, p. 1)

Women's desire to have a good life is rooted in finding the right spouse, entering marriage, building a house, and having children, all of which also have the potential to bring suffering. Looking at this duality of desire, Berlant explains cruel optimism as 'the condition of maintaining attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss' (Berlant, 2006, p. 21). What is suggested is that optimism itself prepares a person for the loss and pain that will come when it is not realised. I would suggest that the women's retrospective view of love as a beautiful mistake captures well the cruelty that lies within optimism. They themselves know that the 'good' lives they desire with love, marriage, houses, and children are embedded in pain and suffering. This is why it is a 'mistake' yet a 'beautiful' one. Women's experience in their everyday lives is to encounter and reencounter the same mistakes in their relationships with their partners. As a result, optimism continues as women persevere to render their 'mistakes' as 'beautiful' ones. In reference to Dickinson's poem above, the nature of hope for the women I have given voice to in this thesis is one of persistence: making the same beautiful mistakes in the hope of achieving the good life they desire.

## Appendix 1

### Village Tank Cascade System



## Appendix 2

### The Questionnaire used for the Household Survey

1. Name of head of the household:
2. Address:
3. Religion:
4. Members of the household

No.	Name	Age	Date of birth	Relationship to the head of household	Level of Education	Employment

5. How did the family of this household come to live in this village?

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6. Marriages in this household

No	Names of the married couple	Year of Marriage	Patrilocal or Matrilocal	Arranged or Love Marriage

7. Assets of the household

Assets	Details
House	
Land	
Vehicle	
Other	

8. Foreign Employment

No.	Name	Relationship to head of household	Place of Employment	Job	Duration

9. Other Family Members in the village

No.	Name	Address	Relationship to head of household	Employment



10. Indicate difficulties the family of this household faced/face in the following areas:

Area	Details
Livelihood	
Civil war	
JVP insurrections	
Health	
Poisoning	

11. Have any deaths occurred in this household?

a. Yes

b. No

12. If yes, please fill in the following table

No	Name of the person who died	Relationship of the person who died to the head of household	Cause of death	Any means of care given in the household, at a hospital, and other

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